WEAVING MY STORY AS A SAMOAN-AMERICAN CLERGYWOMAN

Lalagaina Ose Taeao Fou mo Tama'ita'i/Tina Samoa ile folafolaina ole Talalelei a le Atua

A Practical Research Project

presented to

the Faculty of

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

by

Monalisa Rosa Siofele Lolohea

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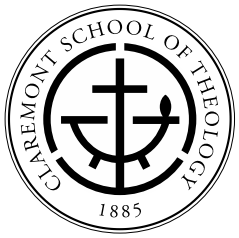

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

WEAVING MY STORY AS A SAMOAN-AMERICAN CLERGYWOMAN
Lalagaina Ose Taeao Fou mo Tama'ita'i/Tina Samoa ile folafolaina ole Talalelei a le Atua

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This project interweaves the past, present, and future generations of Samoan women, particularly those born in the United States and how one might answer her call to ministry and what it means to be a servant leader who embraces her God given gifts and talents to preach, proclaim, and profess the Word of God uniquely and authentically, especially within the United Methodist Church.

This project unravels the cultural dynamics of the *Fa'asamoa,* Samoan way of life, and its tightly knitted weave of the past to the present, while revealing the sacred layers that hinder a culture from growing: physically, emotionally, mentally, and most importantly, spiritually. This project also sheds light on the lack of women in pastoral roles because of their gender and therefore challenges the theological views of the *fa'asamoa* to create a safe space for young people, especially young women to weave their unique stories and how to share them.

This project provided a space for young women to ask questions, discern, listen and partner with Samoan women and Pacific Islander women who overcame adversity to answer their call as ordained ministers in the United Methodist Church; as well in other professions. It draws on the engagement of young Samoan women through a camp gathering that provides breakout sessions and intimate conversations in a cultural style of sharing stories through dance, music, and most importantly, building a foundation in prayer and worship.

Finally, this project is only the first phase of more to come, to engage and empower young Samoan and Samoan-American women to embrace their call to ministry and serve God for such a time as this. To answer 'yes' without fear or hesitation, and to know that they are not alone in their journey; but others like myself and those who began weaving their *tala* (story), and *fala* (mat) long ago, helped prepare a place for the next generation of clergywomen to sit and share in the *fale lotu,* church/house of God that their stories and experiences thread new ways to connect with God *(le Atua),* family *(aiga),* and culture *(atunu'u)*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Ia e ava i lou tama ma lou tina, ina ia faalevaleva ai ou aso i le nuu o le a foaiina mai e le Alii lou Atua ia te oe." Esoto (Exodus) 20:12

First and foremost, all glory, honor and praise to God Almighty whom without, I could not complete this project. Thanks be to God for granting my siblings and I, the most loving and compassionate parents, my father and mother, Reverend Joseph Papu Siofele and Su'esolo Afasene Tali Siofele. Thank you for being my prayer warriors. The constant support in my life and the ones who sacrificed everything to give your children a better life, more opportunities, and to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. You paved the way for all this to be possible, *fa'afetai tele lava,* thank you so much, Mom and Dad. To my beloved mother, Su'e, you are missed every day. We thank God for your faithfulness. Until we meet again Mom, we love you, always. Thank you both again, for living the examples of faith, hope and love. I dedicate this to you, Mom and Dad.

"Lo'u atalii e, faalogo mai ia i le a'oa'o atu a lou tama; aua foi e te tuulafoaiina le upu a lou tina; aua e fai ia mea ma pale matagofie i lou ulu, ma mea e asoa i lou ua."
Faataoto (Proverbs) 1:7

Many people have blessed me and contributed to the creation, development, writing, re-visioning, and completion of this project. For your time, support, guidance and prayers, I thank you. My sincerest appreciation to each of you mentioned here, and to the countless more prayed for in my heart. To my first mentor and advisor, Dr. Lincoln E. Galloway, K. Morgan Edwards Associate Professor of Homiletics at the Claremont School of Theology. *Faafetai tele lava* for your teachings, patience, honesty, support and encouragement. You helped me transition from the hybrid program to the mentoring program and have always been a constant cheerleader and bridge builder in uniting scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. To my dear advisor, Dr. Frank Rogers Jr., whose compassionate teachings and graciousness awakened the importance of

narrative pedagogy—especially in telling my own story as one of the first Samoan-American clergywoman in the UMC and who knows where else. *Fa'afetai tele lava,* for your willingness to work, help, and support me as your advisee; and making certain I learn the powerful impact in telling my story authentically for other young Samoan women and generations to come. My deep gratitude and *fa'afetai tele lava,* also go to Dr. Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook, a dynamic leader and professor, whose own experiences in ministry, academia, and life, laid a platform of hope and affirmation for women like me, to rest assured in God's divine purpose for my life and to exclaim with joy that God is so good. Thank you for sharing your experiences in leadership as the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean of Faculty, and Professor of Practical Theology and Religious Education, while supporting me through this journey. To all of my professors whose lessons and teachings wove a foundation in my life and ministry, and added rainbow of colorful texture to my journey at Claremont School of Theology, *fa'afetai tele lava ma ia faamanuia le Atua ia te outou,* thank you and may God/Allah bless you always!

Na a'u iloa oe a o lei faia oe e a'u i le manava; na a'u faapaiaina oe a o lei fanau mai oe, na a'u tofia oe e fai ma perofeta i nuu. Ieremia (Jeremiah) 1:5

I also want to acknowledge the *Matai,* chiefs, of my *aiga,* families, who gave their time, support, wisdom, love, and passion for culture family, to educate and create new ways to teach the next generation while honoring the past and living for the future. *Malo tautua, fa'afetai tausi aiga,* Thank you for your support and care for our families. To High Talking Chief, Uta Peniamina Tali Afasene and Maria Afasene, thank you for always being available and taking the time to share your experiences while juggling familial duties and responsibilities. I am so grateful to you and your leadership and care for our *aiga.* May God continue to bless you with wisdom, compassion, and divine health to continue to lead us in God's love and peace. To

Paramount Chief Lealali Vaai Siofele Lockhart, the first woman *Alii,* High Chief of our family; thank you for weaving a delicate tapestry into this project and providing a space for more Samoan women to know that God not only calls us to serve in different ways and places; but also equips and empowers us with the tools we need.

O lau afioga o le sulu lea i o'u vae, ma le malamalama i lo'u ala. Salamo (Psalm) 119:105

To my spiritual parents ~ Tama Malolo Manumalo *(Retired)* Reverend Misipati Karapani and Levaivanu Afasene Tali Karapani, whose preaching, teaching, and spiritual guidance laid the foundation for a young child to explore and engage the Bible in her own unique way—thank you for your love and faith in God. *Viia le Alii* – All glory to God for your guidance and support, always! *Ia faamanuia le Atua ia te oulua…Fa'afetai, Fa'afetai tele lava*. To my parents-in-love, Reverend Taike Tu'ulauena and the late Fai'ana Kaumatule Lolohea, ofa lahi atu kia te oulua. Thank you for living out your theology and teaching me the significance of Lotu mo 'Aukai (Prayer and Fast). Thank you for embracing me as your daughter, and for your valuable lessons as we share during *fakafamili,* family prayer time. *Ofa atu moe lotu.*

To my best friends and constant companions; the ones who've gone to battle with me and beside me. To my day one's—my loving and closest friends who know me inside out, my sister and brothers, Setema Su'e Siofele-Sagapolutele (Tiki: John-Keawe, Jaron-Keawe, Jenai-Keawe); Joseph Samuelu Siofele (Tuala: Jonah Ioane, Mathyas-John [MJ], Su'e, and Rosa); and Ioane (John) Faaolataga Siofele. Thank you for loving me unconditionally and always being there for us, especially Hevani. I love you all, always and forever!

Last but not least, I thank God for my loving and supportive husband, my Christ partner in ministry and greatest supporter, Langi Kaumatule Lolohea. Thank you for giving me room to grow and heal. Thank you for allotting me the space, time, and grace to 'live into my authority'

as a woman, daughter, wife, and mother. Because of your dedication, love, and honesty, I was able to complete this project. While you chose to care for our beautiful daughter, Fai'ana Su'esolo 'I Hevani Lolohea, you sacrificed so much for our family. *Fa'afetai – Malo 'Aupito – Viia le Alii.* Thank you, my love. Thank you for your patience that empowered me to joyfully celebrate Apostle Paul's words in 2 Timothy 4: 7, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." I love you both and may God continue to be our Source and Strength who illumines our path, wherever we are called to serve Him.

Mai le taele o lo'u loto, faafetai, faafetai, faafetai tele lava ma ia faamanuia le Atua.

From the depths of my heart, I am eternally grateful. Thank you and God bless you all!

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The problem addressed in this project is the lack of resources, support, and opportunities for Samoan-American women to dialogue, be mentored, and receive encouragement and affirmation as they bring the fullness of their cultural identity in conversation with the call to leadership and pastoral ministry in the United Methodist Church.

Purpose of the Project

Ole toe lalagaina o measina a le Atua ile paleali'i o ana galuega i Tama'ita'i/Tina ile ofoina atu o latou ola e tusa ai ma le valaauina e fai ma auauna tala'i e tala'ia ma folafola le talalelei ole malo o le Atua.

The purpose of this project is to shed light and provide resources to support and create a safe space for Samoan-American women, especially young women, to discern, embrace, and answer their call to ministry within the United Methodist Church (UMC) denomination. This project provides awareness and empowerment for Samoan-American women to bring the fullness of their cultural identity in conversation with their call to leadership and pastoral ministry particularly in the UMC, and perhaps other mainline protestant churches within the Pacific Islands.

This project seeks to focus attention on young Samoan, Tongan, Fijian, and Pacific Islander women within the United Methodist Church, and design ways to:

(i) Encourage them to discern their call, affirm their identities, and live out their faith in their cultural contexts;

(ii) Create a space for dialogue, change, and inclusion of women to be embraced by a culture that is rooted in the love of God and love for people;

(iii) Provide a safe space for young people (youth and young adults) to seek and explore their vocational aspirations with church and community leaders; and

(iv) Challenge and empower the next generations of Samoans, Tongans, Fijians and Pacific Islanders in their call to ministry while living authentically in a bi-cultural society.

In the life of a Pacific Islander woman, specifically Samoan-American women in the United States and within the United Methodist Church (UMC), opportunities are rare and far in between to serve as professionals in education, law, theology, politics, and other spheres of life. This project aims to cultivate a healthy, thriving, and life affirming space to absorb the resources provided and assist each young female Pacific Islander who is learning to navigate her future in seminary, a local church, hospital, campus ministry, or where ever God calls her to go.

Methodology and Sourcing

There is a plethora of resources that exist within the UMC unfortunately the dissemination of information and opportunities to the ethnic ministries and within the Samoan churches in the UMC is disconnected. There is a lack of understanding or participation by the current leaders and pastors of the Samoan churches to share and expose their young people to these amazing resources and life-affirming opportunities.

This project raises questions about the cultural clash of being born and raised in America, yet rooted in the *Fa'asamoa,* Samoan culture and ways; what it means to navigate through both worlds; and what it means to live authentically as a child of God. Marie Ropeti explains, "Women typically make up 60 per cent of the membership of many of our churches. Yet most

Pacific churches argue that they do not ordain women into ministry because it does not suit the way their cultures live."[1]

Valaau ale Atua: Call from God

This project was birthed from personal experience. As a daughter of immigrants, born and raised in the Samoa's. My mother, Su'esolo Afasene Tali, was born in Vatia, Amerika Samoa. My father, Iosefa (Joseph) Papu Siofele, was born in Vaiala, Upolu, Samoa (formerly named Western Samoa) and raised in Satala, Amerika Samoa. Together, my parents overcame many obstacles to transport and voyage to Honolulu, Hawai'i. There, along with their eldest daughter, would increase the *aiga*, family, from three to seven: Mom, Dad, sister Setema (September), myself, and two younger brothers, Iosefa (Joseph) Jr. and Ioane (John). My parents journeyed from Amerika Samoa to Hawai'i to provide better opportunities for their children and family. Their sacrifice and decision to leave home: their parents, siblings, the culture and comfort that housed them, and journey thousands of miles to a foreign land and begin anew was not an easy decision. Prayer, faith, and ultimate trust in God was the sure foundation that kept them rooted. Their trust in God, *faatuatua ile Atua*, and in one another, was the assurance that Su'esolo and Iosefa (Joseph) would be taken care of. God's plans for their lives mirrored Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your might and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths; Ia e faatuatua ia leova ma lou

[1] Marie Ropeti, "A Biblical Basis for the Ordination of Women in the Pacific," in *Weavings: Women Doing Theology in Oceania*, eds. by Lydia Johnson and Joan Alleluia Filemoni-Tofaeono (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 2003), 136.

loto atoa; ma e aua le faalagolago i lou lava atamai. Ia e manatua o Ia i ou ala uma, ona faatonuina ai lea e Ia lava ou ʻ ala."[2]

All things *fa'asamoa,* the Samoan way, were learned at home: language, the Bible, church, family, and conversations were taught in my native tongue. Everything else was spoken in English, the American way. *"Samoa Muamua le Atua,"* God first, Samoa. This is the motto etched on both American Samoa and Samoa's flags. This cultural understanding and belief is embedded at a young age and becomes a part of a child's understanding and way of living communally and without borders. God and culture; culture and God. They are one and the same. The Gospel and Culture[3], the Samoan way, *fa'asamoa,* go hand in hand.

Mine Pase explains, "Culture is defined as the way in which human societies order their corporate life, including their customs, values, arts, and sacred traditions."[4] Samoan women "In a Christianized culture such as Samoa, Christianity and culture appear to be largely inseparable, certainly in contrast with the Western concept of the separation of church and state. The two entities are seen to be tightly interwoven."[5] The weaving of cultural identity in God and others led me in this direction and the desire to provide support to other young Samoan-American girls who one day discover that they have a passion for God and declaring goodness and mercy to all.

My desire to provide a way and means for future young women of Samoan ancestry and Pacific Islander roots to have access to resources while discerning their call to ministry is crucial, especially in current times. This project aims to open doors and help other Samoan-American

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[2] Proverbs 3:5-6 (NRSV); *O le Tusi Paia: O le Feagaiga Tuai ma Le Feagaiga Fou lea ua Faasamoaina,* Samoan Translation.

[3] Mine Pase, "Gospel and Culture: Samoan Style," in *Weavings: Women Doing Theology in Oceania*, eds. Lydia Johnson and Joan Alleluia Filemoni-Tofaeono (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 2003), 72.

[4] Pase, *Gospel and Culture,* 72.

[5] Pase, *Gospel and Culture,* 72.

women, both young and seasoned, understand that they too, are able to answer God's call upon their lives and what that may entail. This project will paint a clearer picture of the interactions of Samoan women in the *aiga* (family), *lotu* (church) *ma le Ekalesia* (congregation), *atunu'u* (village/community), and *lalolagi* (world).

The role of a Samoan woman has progressed since the early days of the missionaries, when the London Missionary Society (LMS) sent missionaries to the Samoan islands and uprooted much of their belief systems and un-Christian like homes, families, and cultural practices. Author Mine Pase explains,

> There are also times when Gospel and culture are in opposition to one another, and do not seem to connect. This is a fact in numerous Samoan churches today, as it was in the time and culture of Jesus Christ. Jesus was the light (Gospel) that came to enlighten the dark world (culture), but people of his day were uncomfortable with his message and thus rejected him, which eventually led to his death. His crucifixion will bear witness eternally to the fact that his culture did not want to connect with him. In our Samoan culture, these ""do-not-connect"" realities are prevalent. Samoa is a male-oriented culture, and women still hold a sub-dominant place in society.[6]

As a Samoan-American clergywoman in the UMC, I experienced a lack of resources, availability, support, and mentorship when I accepted my call to ministry and moved my entire life from the islands of Hawai'i to seminary in Southern California. After confirming my acceptance into the Claremont School of Theology (CST), I knew that life would no longer be the same—it would be amazing! However, financial costs of moving, transitions, and the cost to attend school were factors that I needed to explore—and this road was often a lonely one.

I received minimal pastoral care and guidance once I confirmed my desire to continue my education in seminary and answer my call to ordained ministry. My pastor, my father, was a licensed local pastor who served in the church half-time, while working a regular full-time job.

[6] Pase, *Gospel and Culture*, 74.

Most of the Samoan clergy were either retired, serving in a local church as a retiree, or licensed local pastors. They were not familiar with the process of going through seminary, because most went a different route—and so there was no manual on 'how to' apply, where to begin, and who to ask questions regarding this nudging in my life.

Although there were many women in ministry through the district I lived and served in; there was minimal information and guidance on how a Pacific Islander, Samoan-American woman could begin her theological studies and become a certified candidate. These unchartered waters began stirring in directions never before, and therefore, uncovering answers and seeking the people and resources to make the necessary transitions happen in my life. Hariesa Faitala, a teacher and storyteller whose journey mirrors mine, explains as follows:

> My name, Faitala, means ""telling stories,"" and the story I have to tell is about the evolution of my life in God's service. This journey is the first of its nature for the island nation of Niue. It is thus an exploration into unknown territory.
>
> Traditionally in Niuean society, theological studies and ordained ministry have been the exclusive privilege and domain of men. This began to change when the Ekalesia Niue sent me to the Pacific Theological College. Initially, the intention was that I should undertake a Diploma. What a temptation it was to stay where I was, with money, new wheels, and a re-established shop from my father. Nevertheless, toward the end of 1992 I was accepted into PTC.
>
> At the beginning of this ""phase two"" of my theological journey, the church leaders were happy to see me coming home with my impressive white piece of paper. Suddenly, it dawned on them that they did not know where to place me or what to do with me. My brother, who is a minster, kept telling me to be strong because I was well aware of this sensitive and controversial issue of women in ministry before I left for Fiji, and that I should not be surprised at the hostility of many church people. This period was my ""wilderness experience.""[7]

[7] Hariesa Faitala, "Journey To A Forbidden Land: My Life In God's Service," in *Weavings: Women Doing Theology in Oceania*, eds. Lydia Johnson and Joan Alleluia Filemoni-Tofaeono (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 2003), 200.

Faitala's "wilderness experience" epitomizes what I felt and realized after starting seminary at Claremont School of Theology. It was a new, untouched, and once impossible vision or topic. However, in 2011, God made a way!

This project aims to provide a way for young Samoan-American women to respond to the nudging upon their lives, and what is required to serve God, and people. This project is the result of my personal experience as a Samoan-American woman who began my journey as the daughter of a pastor and later, finally answering my call to attend seminary and graduate with a Master of Divinity to begin the process towards ordination as an Elder. As a young woman, I grew up seeing only men preach, lead worship services on Sundays, and lead the committees of the church. It's not that women were not allowed. However, the distinction between who was the leader and who was the support was evident in every aspect of the church and also within the communities in which I lived.

Therefore, a desire to provide a different way…a way for future young girls and women of Samoan ancestry and Pacific Islander roots to have access to people, places, and resources to navigate through unchartered waters; this is one of the reasons for this project. As a Samoan clergywoman in the United Methodist Church, I experienced a lack of resources, support, and mentors available in my native language. No manual or guide was presented on where to go, or who to ask for assistance. Not even a phone number of another clergywoman or mentor in the entire California-Pacific Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church that could comfort or provide compassionate care during this unstable moment. As I embarked on this journey, I had many questions. *Do I leave my well-paying job to go back to school and begin a whole new career? Will I make enough money to support my family? Pay for my financial obligations? Would I need to move from the islands where I grew up and love with all my heart?*

Theologian and Writer, Ilisapeci Meo explains, "Pacific women today are becoming increasingly conscious of how traditional practices have relegated them to a status that is inferior and subordinate to men…[and] throughout the Pacific Islands, cultural practices affecting women vary from island to island."[8] I realized that there were no other Samoan women in my denomination serving as clergy, chaplains, missionaries, campus ministers, associate pastors; nowhere in ministry in a denomination that has promoted and empowered women to serve for years. It was heartbreaking, but not hopeless. There were women serving in the denomination at different levels. Sadly enough, they did not identify as Samoan or Samoan-American, nor as Pacific Islander or Polynesian.

I was extremely grateful for the few women who paved the way for me in the islands of Hawai'i. There I met several Pacific Islander women of Tongan ancestry who serve as Elders in the UMC and am grateful for their support and encouragement in navigating unchartered waters.

Once word surfaced of my enrollment in the Master of Divinity program at the Claremont School of Theology (CST), life accelerated and my identity began to take on a new form. No longer just Monalisa, but now, Monalisa-the certified candidate in ministry studying at CST. These questions piled up within me for years because there was no one to turn to, until I met an elder, both in age and seniority, who preached on Sunday morning and blessed and distributed the Holy Communion elements to us that very day. Hawai'i District Superintendent, Reverend Barbara Grace-Ripple was the first woman preacher I had ever met in the UMC and brave enough to meet with the Samoan fellowship at that time. She was the first woman preacher I had ever seen. She was the first woman preacher who led the entire Hawai'i District and was the

[8] Ilisapeci Meo, "Asserting Women's Dignity In A Patriarchal World," in *Weavings: Women Doing Theology in Oceania,* eds. Lydia Johnson and Joan Alleluia Filemoni-Tofaeono (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 2003), 150.

District Superintendent in the early 1990's. She was the first woman pastor that shook my hand and asked me *when* I was going to seminary (and I was only a teenager with no thought of this)!

I equated my interaction with Reverend Barbara to the experience shared by Reverend Leontine Ruth Turpeau Current Kelly. Author and daughter, Angella Current wrote, "According to family narratives, Bishop Clair uttered the words [upon meeting Leontine]: Oh, how I wish you were a boy so that my mantle might fall upon you."[9] My interpretation of this statement is that bishop only wished Leontine was a boy so that he could groom and encourage him to one day become a bishop in the UMC. Well, fortunately for Bishop Clair, in 1984, Leontine Ruth Turpeau Current Kelly became the first African American woman Bishop, elected by the Western Jurisdiction and served in the California-Nevada Conference.[10]

As a child of immigrants from the islands of Samoa, I have been challenged to not only describe but to create space through this project and embrace change. My parents left the islands of Samoa to give their children a better life, better opportunities, better education; I am obliged to not sit idly by waiting for an opportunity to share resources discovered along my journey. Instead, I want to encourage young Samoan women to discern their call, affirm their identities, and live out their faith.

Elizabeth Liebert explains that "Discernment is far more than the decisions we make. It is a discriminating way of life, in which we come to notice with increasing ease and accuracy our inner and outer actions affect our identity in God."[11] There is no better time than now, to engage in conversation, *talanoa*, with Samoan-American women who went above and beyond their

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[9] Angella Current, *Breaking Barriers: An African American Family and the Methodist Story* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 17.

[10] Current, *Breaking Barriers,* 111.

[11] Elizabeth Liebert, *The Way of Discernment: Spiritual Practices for Decision Making,* 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 23.

cultural limitations to and exceed patriarchal and systemic boundaries. Ilisapeci Meo explains the dualism of women in the cultures of the Pacific Islands:

> The way women are treated in most of our Pacific communities spells out clearly that only men are created in God's image; therefore, God's image in women is obscured. Yet it is God's image in women that makes women unique and equal to men. In the traditional cultures of Pacific Island societies, women are regarded as important, but the quality of that importance remains questionable.[12]

Women have evolved significantly in roles of clergy and leadership within the United Methodist Church. The denomination is known for its support of women as lay preachers, deacons, and as ordained elders. Many women have found their voice and been affirmed in their call to ministry through the denomination. Much has changed since Helenor M. Davisson's ordination in 1866. Yet, women continue to fight for their rights when considered for church appointments, fair salaries equal to their male counterparts, and provided resources to be effective in language ministry settings. Although much changed in the mid-1800s; there is still a very long road ahead for women in ministry.

The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) explains, "Clergywomen in The United Methodist Church and its predecessor bodies have a rich history, dating from John Wesley's mid-18th century pronouncement of women's call to preach as "extraordinary."[13] GBHEM names the women who've contributed to this movement of change and empowerment—recognizing that God calls not only men, but also women to proclaim the Gospel and to declare it to the nations and people.

The UMC has made great strides since the 1800's to be more inclusive of women however, one area that lacks the multitude of resources and support is in the language ministries

[12] Meo, *Asserting Women's Dignity,* 150.

[13] "Clergy Leaders," General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM), accessed December 2, 2019, https://www.gbhem.org/clergy/clergywomen/.

and specifically for ethnic women. Although it has been 64 years since "the approval of full clergy rights for women by the 1956 General Conference of the Methodist Church,"[14] not much can be said for the outreach and impact of this monumental feat for all women in the UMC; and especially for young Samoan-American women, or all ethnic women continue in their journey in their call to ministry. This can be traced back to the history of the Samoan people and the religious beliefs that women are revered and capable in all areas of life: home, family, church groups, government, village councils, and more…except as the head of a church. That call or position is strictly reserved for men. This contradicts the current status of women in the *fa'asamoa,* the Samoan culture and way, because women serve as *matai,* chiefs, and in many other levels of society in American Samoa and Samoa.

Fa'asamoa: Samoan Way of Life and Women's Role in Culture

Dr. Alo Silia Pa'usisi Finau explains, "Samoan legends and myths document that matriarchal leadership existed prior to colonization and Christianity. This was evident in the administration of Queen Salamasina, the first official tafa'ifa (hold of four paramount chiefly titles) in the history of the country."[15] Dr. Finau goes on to share the important role that women portrayed, "era of matriarchs" that existed in Samoa long before Christianity and colonization erupted in the islands in the mid-1800s.[16] Finau shares, "the leadership positions in families, churches, local government, national government, and most cultural, religious, and modern

[14] "Clergy Resources," General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM), accessed December 2, 2019, https://www.gbhem.org/clergy/clergyresources/.

[15] Silia Pa'usisi Finau, "Women's Leadership In Traditional Villages in Samoa: The Cultural, Social, and Religious Challenges" (PhD Diss., Victoria University of Wellington, 2017), i.

[16] Finau, "Women's Leadership," i.

organizations have been predominantly held by males.[17] One might then ask, when did the woman become a second-class citizen and viewed less than equal to the man? When did the *fa'asamoa,* Samoan way of life, lose its respect and honor for the matriarch, or mother/woman of the family? How did the highest position within the country replace the woman with a man?

These imminent thoughts are constantly at odds while investigating and researching the depth of gender inequality in a homeland that revered women, to the highest authority; then suddenly stopped. A study conducted by Dr. Alo Silia Pa'usisi Finau indicates that women face difficult times as they struggle to maintain balance while determined to execute leadership roles within families, villages, social and political realms.[18] Understanding the historical background of the *matai*, chiefly system, creates awareness and brings to light the disparities caused not by the people of Samoa, but by those who want power that is not of their own.

Feagaiga Paia: Sacred Relationships

In the *fa'asamoa,* the Samoan culture and way, there is a special relationship between brother and sister that exists, *feagaiga paia,* a sacred covenant. Rev. Dr. Faafouina Iofi writes, "In this relationship, the sister occupies a very special place in the family circle. She is addressed as *"lo'imata o le tuagane"* (apple of brother's eye), *tamasa* (sacred child), *seetalaluma*; (one who occupies the front seat), or *tama-faaolioli* (child who is the pride of the family)."[19] Through this sacred relationship, in the Samoa's as well as throughout the Pacific Islands, this covenant is highly regarded and honored still in today's families. This practice of respect and admiration

[17] Finau, "Women's Leadership," i.
[18] Finau, "Women's Leadership," 3.
[19] Faafouina Iofi, "Samoan Cultural Values and Christian Thought: An Attempt to Relate Samoan Traditional Values to Christian Understanding" (D.Min. Thesis, School of Theology at Claremont, 1980), 14.

between siblings has been a marker of peace, love, and protection in the family. Rev. Dr. Iofi continues to share, "the brother's responsibility is to serve and cater to the needs of his sister and to protect her with his life. All heavy responsibilities are upon his shoulders for the care and support of the sister. Samoans have a saying, "E mu mata o le tuagane i le tuafafine" (the brother's face is burned because of his faithful service to his sister.)"[20] Thus the relationship between a brother and sister is not taken lightly, nor is it neglected or scorned. These familial relationships are nurtured to ensure the *aiga,* family lineage and relationships continue from one generation to the next.

Matai o Aiga: Chiefs of the Family

High Talking Chief Uta Peniamina Tali Afasene, *Matai* for the Lauti-Uta family from Vatia, Amerika Samoa, has been a *matai,* High Talking Chief for 13 ½ years. He continues to serve his *aiga,* family and extended families while living in Southern California. High Talking Chief Uta explains, "My role as a matai of the family is to be fair, honest, and forthcoming in any decision that might occur within any family disputes within the family. Secondly, to be sure that any decision that I make on any family matter, is to be fair and done accordingly. Lastly, I am to treat every family member with dignity and respect regardless."[21] High Talking Chief Uta goes on to say, "There is no difference between male or female *matai's*, high chiefs, however, it is very demanding and the load might often be overbearing for women.[22]

[20] Iofi, "Samoan Culture," 14.

[21] High Talking Chief Uta Peniamina Tali Afasene, Phone Interview with author, February 1, 2020.

[22] High Talking Chief Uta, Phone Interview.

High Talking Chief Uta elaborated on his thoughts of "overbearing for women"—because many times when a *faalavelave,* family emergencies or unexpected situations occur within a Samoan *aiga,* family, the *matai* is the first to be notified together with the clergy and ministers of the *aiga.* A *faalavelave* is a gathering of the *aiga* which may include a funeral, wedding (sometimes events happen concurrently), a celebration of any sort that requires the presence and guidance of the *matai*. High Talking Chief Uta emphasizes, "A *Matai* is someone that the immediate and extended family members trust and have agreed to appoint as the family's guardian/overseer of all things pertaining to the *aiga.* One must possess leadership skills and well versed in the *fa'asamoa*, understanding, knowing, and keeping up with the intricate and complicated culture and ways of the Samoan people. Honesty and trustworthiness are key characteristics for any *matai,* especially if he or she is expected to be not only the mouthpiece, but the guardian for *le aiga atoa,* whole family."[23]

From the significant message and inspiration shared by High Talking Chief Uta, one can account for the flexibility and adaptability of a *matai,* always willing and able to leave his/her own family to tend to the larger needs of the *aiga.* All of these factors plus the cost for travel, lodging, meals, rentals, cultural attire, expenses for preparation of the family's home, church, and much more, are mandatory inclusions that any *matai* must be prepared to handle for the *aiga,* at any given time.

These sentiments are echoed by Paramount Chief, Lealali Vaai Siofele Lockhart, the first woman and *Ali'i,* highest rank in the *matai* system. Paramount Chief Lealali received the honors of her *matai* title, Lealali, known and defined as "the protector and guardian of Tuisafua, a former king in the islands of Samoa; also means organizer for government—or governmental

[23] High Talking Chief Uta, Phone Interview.

organizer."[24] As a Samoan woman and one of eight children to the late Pastor Papu Siofele and Mrs. Faauliulitoaletuimanua Laie Siofele; Paramount Chief Lealali's journey to becoming the first female *matai* in her family was not glorious or welcomed. She attests the pain, humiliation, and struggle to that of Jesus—when he was not welcomed into his own hometown or by his own people—and yet, was embraced by so many others who knew and believed in him.

Her testimony to becoming Paramount Chief, *Alii* began 10 years ago, when the title of *Lealali* sat vacant for nearly 50 years. Prior to Paramount Chief Lealali's claim, this title was only held by men. Along with being named the *Alii* of the family, one of the main reasons it sat vacant for so long was because, "Every time the title was conferred to another man," as Paramount Chief Lealali shared, "no matter who the person was, within two years of serving as the *matai,* that person died."[25] This information was withheld from Paramount Chief Lealali prior to her leadership. It was only after several years and conducting her own research that she discovered the pattern and to her surprise, no one mentioned or shared with her upon receiving this honor.

As a Samoan woman, whose parents migrated from American Samoa as messengers of the faith, Paramount Chief Lealali grew up in a Seventh Day Adventist church, and her father, Pastor Papu Siofele, was a pioneer in growing the Samoan Independent Seventh Day Adventist Church, now known worldwide as SISDAC. Her family and especially her faith and culture agreed that women had no place at the altar, let alone as the head of a family as the *matai.* Like High Talking Chief Uta, the decision to carry and serve as a *matai* is given by the immediate and extended families—and like Paramount Chief Lealali, she was chosen by her extended family to

[24] Paramount Chief Lealali Vaai Siofele Lockhart, Phone Interview with author, March 2, 2020.

[25] Paramount Chief Lealali, Phone Interview.

serve in such a role. Unfortunately, because she is a middle child and has older brothers, many in her immediate *aiga* were against her and did not agree to the conferment. Nonetheless, her journey to attaining this title was filled with strife and eventually to court. Others in her *aiga* sought to remove the title from her and give it to a man of the family. Paramount Chief Lealali shared:

> When I first started as the chief, my oldest brother, Chief Faumuina, was already leading our *aiga.* Many times I felt neglect and isolated because my brothers were not very supportive of me. It wasn't easy in the beginning because I was disregarded and not included or acknowledged in family meetings and major decision making bodies.[26]

And so, as a strong, intelligent, and resilient Samoan woman, she worked through the system and immersed herself in the community at large. She did research on the *fa'asamoa,* Samoan culture and way of life, and learned to build relationships with others. She learned how to be an orator by speaking and engaging in conversations with other *matai's*, especially with the help of her Talking Chief, Namulauulu, an orator who was bestowed his chiefly title at the age of 8 years old. Together, they continue to serve the *aiga potopoto*, extended families.

Paramount Chief Lealali understood the cultural dynamics and lack of female *matai,* she also understood that she had to earn a seat in the *fale*, the home. Paramount Chief Lealali credits her older brothers, the late Chief Faumuina, Pastor Willie Papu, Pastor Joe Siofele, Pastor Sato Siofele, and Pastor Afereti Afereti, for challenging her to be the best she can be; but also to learn so much appreciation for the cultural ways that she is now able to pass on to the next generation of leaders in her family. Paramount Chief Lealali also credits her sisters, the late Mrs. Elisa Siofele Young and Doreka Siofele Togafau, for their constant support and prayers in her journey as paramount chief. *E lelei le matitiva ae fesaga'i,* a saying that Paramount Chief Lealali uses to

[26] Paramount Chief Lealali, Phone Interview.

guide her thought process and organization of family *faalavelave.* She believes that it is good to be poor together, than to navigate the journey alone.

Suli o 'Aiga: Representative of the Family

According to a statement made by Dr. Margaret Mead, author of *Coming of Age in Samoa,* she writes, "Rank, not of birth but of title, is very important in Samoa."[27] Dr. Margaret Mead goes on to share that the entire social web of the islands finds it mettle in the hierarchy of the *matai,* and the system is one of the twin cornerstones of Samoan life.[28] The *matai* is a highly regarded position in the family, village, and community of Samoa. It is not something that one applies for, but instead is recommended for as they show the true gifts of a matai. Dr. Margaret Mead explains, "Unquestionably, the *matai* occupies a very special niche in Samoan society, factually and legally."[29]

The position of *matai* has several tiers, and as High Talking Chief Uta explains, "The Paramount Chief is one of the highest in rank or authority bearing a hereditary title who is the head of an extended family or village. Other chiefs are second, High Talking Chief, and third, Talking Chief, in ranks.[30] According to one study conducted in American Samoa, under Section 6.0107 of the Revised Code of American Samoa lists four factors the High Court is to consider in trying *matai* disputes:

> 1. The best hereditary right in which the male and female descendants shall be equal in families where this has been customary, otherwise, the male descendant shall prevail over the female.
> 2. The wish of the majority of plurality of those clans of the family as customary in that family.

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[27] A.P. Lutali and William J. Stewart, "The Chieftal System in Twentieth Century America: Legal Aspects of the Matai System in the Territory of American Samoa," *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law* 4 (1974): 388.

[28] Lutali and Stewart, *The Chieftal System,* 288.

[29] Lutali and Stewart, *The Chieftal System,* 288.

[30] High Talking Chief Uta, Phone Interview.

3. The forcefulness, character, personality, and knowledge of Samoan customs [of the claimants].
4. The value of the holder of the *matai* title to the family, the village, and the country.[31]

These criteria were established to help the High Court of American Samoa decide alongside families when disputes of title holders and split titles are problematic. According to a Los Angeles Times interview with June Pouesi, director of the National Office of Samoan Affairs in Carson, California: "there are more than 50,000 Samoans in the Los Angeles County—about equal to the entire population of American Samoa."[32] However, according to the 2010 U.S. Census, there were 184, 440 Samoan people in the United States stateside population, including those who have partial Samoan ancestry.

The territory of American Samoa has a population of approximately 55, 689 people (as of 2018). In the independent State of Samoa, formerly known as Western Samoa, there is approximately 197, 978 people (as of 2019).[33] The influx of Samoans living abroad have made the *matai* system and all other parts of a dynamic culture review how and what can be done to maintain the *fa'asamoa,* the Samoan way, and keep it thriving. As more men work and strive to be the breadwinners for the *aiga,* family, the woman's workload increases. Whether or not children are at home, the care is extended to nieces and nephews while also caring for parents, grandparents, and extended family members. Coupled with daily housework and cooking meals throughout the day and delegating time for duties to church, village, and school; an increase of

[31] Lutali and Stewart, *The Chieftal System,* 394.
[32] Jessica Garrison, "Samoan Americans at a Crossroads," *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 2000, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2000-apr-14-me-19599-story.html.
[33] World Population Review Information, www.worldpopulationreview.com/countries/samoa-population, accessed on January 6, 2020.

women in leadership roles are on the rise. However, this does not necessarily mean as leaders in the village or community at large.

Unfortunately, there are still those villages in Samoa and American Samoa that do not allow women to serve in any leadership capacities, especially as *matai,* chiefs. According to the Village *Fono* (Samoan term for a meeting or council) Act 1990, this was enacted to give state recognition of the importance of the village *fono* to local governance, among other things. Overall, less than 10% of the *matai* population in Samoa were women in 2011.[34] Throughout the studies conducted in 2011, of the 240 villages surveyed that year, 41 of the traditional villages do not allow women to be bestowed with *matai,* chief, titles.[35] Dr. Silila Finau's study also shows that 34 villages do not allow resident female *matai,* chiefs, [and those who already hold title for their families] to participate in village council meetings, *fono.*

Historically, Samoan people have had a tradition of female chiefs as traditional leaders.[36] Author and Researcher, Dr. Silila Finau explains of the war goddess and female warrior Nafanua, who ruled some constituencies of the country, and Queen Salamasina, the original holder of four paramount chiefly titles (tafa'ifa) and gained sovereign control of the nation for more than 40 years.[37] Finau goes on to share that Samoa revered women and held them in high regard; especially those whose gifts in leadership, education, and understanding of the *fa'asamoa.* One author explains, "Women gain their strength from the ultimate norm of Samoan

[34] Samoan Bureau of Statistics, 2015, https://www.sbs.gov.ws/.
[35] Finau, "Women's Leadership," 2.
[36] Neil Gunson, "Sacred Women Chiefs and Female 'Headmen' in Polynesia History," *Journal of the Pacific History* 22, no.3: 139.
[37] Finau, "Women's Leadership," 3.

ideology, the covenant, *feagaiga,* between sisters and brothers—a relationship where brothers are obligated to serve and protect their sisters as well as any of her offspring for life."[38]

However, when the missionaries arrived in American Samoa and Samoa, a division and reformation began. During the time of missionaries and colonial eras, the cultural ways began to diminish in social systems, and many of the status of Samoan women depleted to nearly nothing. The leadership authority that had been equivalent to the chiefs and orators dissolved as a result of women's lesser rank; and alteration of some characteristics of the traditional Samoan culture were made when Christianity replaced the Samoan indigenous religion.[39] Cultural norms were no longer respected or seen as wholesome or 'holy' and colonialism made its way into the fabric of everyday life for the Samoan people. Those left most desolate and affected by the colonizers, the missionaries demands, were Samoan women.

Women's leadership in Samoan village communities is neither recognized nor acknowledged due to cultural restrictions, religious beliefs, social assumptions, and the patriarchal nature of the administration of local government.[40] Those harsh stipulations placed upon the culture and especially women so long ago, continue to take precedence in society today. Dr. Silila Finau explains, "Women believe that they are leaders in their own rights because in the original Samoan tradition, women embrace authority over families and village communities."[41] However, what is constituted as a cultural norm is far from it.

The Legendary Samoan Woman: a reference that Samoan people respectfully regard the elite status of the woman in the hierarchical structure of traditional families and village

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[38] Finau, "Women's Leadership," 3.
[39] Finau, "Women's Leadership," 3.
[40] Finau, "Women's Leadership," 3.
[41] RP Gilson, "Samoa 1830-1900: The Politics of a Multi-Cultural Community," *The Journal of the Polynesian Society 80,* no.3 (1971): 391-394.

communities[42] is somewhat 'legendary' because it is not often practiced or shared in society. Nevertheless, the dignitary connotations, *fa'alupega,* is fitting to the prestigious status of the Samoan female, *Tama'ita'i Samoa,* is highly honored.[43] Dr. Silila Finau constitutes the sacredness of the female who holds a ceremonial clergy-like position, *ositaulaga*.[44] Author Edwin Burrows explains, "Sacredness…the most important aspect of leadership"[45] extends beyond family duties and responsibilities. Burrows writes, "the *tama'ita'i,* conducts a morning-prayer utilizing the light from a coconut lamp, *molipopo…*the prayer calls for the spirits of the ancestors to protect family members from enemies and accidents.[46]

The Samoan women are known as the most sacred, *tamasa,* of all the siblings.[47] This role is established and founded on the premise that no one is allowed to disobey or cross the *tamasa.* She is the most privileged lady, *'augafa'apae,*[48] and honored by her siblings, parents, and extended family, *aiga Potopoto.* The role of the *'augafa'apae* is also as the peacemaker, *pae ma le auli,* who irons out differences and harmonizes people.[49]

Tama Malolo Manumalo, Retired Minister, Reverend Misipati Karapani and his *faletua,* partner in ministry and wife, Mrs. Levaivanu Afasene Tali Karapani, shared on the significance role of women saying, "the woman's role in the *aiga*, is best described as the *pae ma le auli*, because she is the stronghold of the family. The mother, grandmother, sister, aunty—all those in one woman—the mother, receives the good, the bad, the ugly, and instead of spewing out

[42] Finau, "Women's Leadership," 4.
[43] Finau, "Women's Leadership," 5.
[44] Finau, "Women's Leadership," 5.
[45] Edwin G. Burrows, "Breed and border in Polynesia," *Journal of American Anthropologists,* 41, no.1 (1939): 1-21.
[46] Burrow, "Breed and border," 13.
[47] Finau, "Women's Leadership," 5.
[48] Finau, "Women's Leadership," 5.
[49] Finau, "Women's Leadership," 5.

negative and hateful things, a mother becomes the sounding board and the one who irons out, "*le pae ma le auli ole aiga,"* the comforter, peacemaker, promoter of love, forgiveness, compassion, gentleness, and care."[50]

Lalagaina ose Taeao Fou: Weaving A New Way

In another interview with young Samoan clergy males, a comment was made, "I think that there are no clergy women because of the title of *faletua,* spouse of the pastor. This role is specifically given to the wife of a clergyman and her role is to be the best assistant, driver, caregiver for the children, and educational assistant/tutor (the one to sit at the table and do homework with the children). *Faletua,* has its meaning rooted as, *fale* means home or housing, *tua* means back or support. Women are usually divided into two categories: *faletua* and *tausi. Faletua* i.e. wives of chiefs, *tausi* i.e. wives of orators.[51]

Reverend Misipati and Levaivanu Karapani served as the pastor of the Samoan Language Ministry at Olive United Methodist Church since July 1, 1977. During his time at Olive UMC, the Samoan language ministries were blossoming and prospered to over 15 churches in the California-Pacific Conference, home to local churches in Southern California, Hawai'i, Guam and Saipan. During their tenure at Olive UMC, Samoan churches thrived and would congregate with hundreds of leaders and young people in their bi-annual church gathering, *Ekalesia Metotisi Tu'ufatasi,* which met in Honolulu, Hawai'i, and Carson, California. Reverend Misipati and Levaivanu Karapani shared the following:

> The Samoan churches have not been growing in the United States, particularly in the Cal-Pac Conference because of the lack of recruitment in ministry—as elders, and as the

[50] Reverend Misipati Karapani and Levaivanu Afasene Tali Karapani, Phone Interview with the author, February 2, 2020.

[51] "The Orator: O le Tulafale," The Orator Film, New Zealand, YouTube video, www.Theoratorfilm.co.nz/samoan-culture.

> former pastors of the church—we should have recruited more young people during our time but now, there is no one, no one to continue the legacy of the Samoan churches, and it is extremely difficult now because no young people feel called to go into ministry, or seminary, and return to shepherd the Samoan flocks.[52]

Reverend Karapani expressed agony and concern over the lack of Samoan people, especially the young adults he and many other pastors taught and groomed in scripture and tradition, unfortunately, he and Levaivanu are now the only surviving pastoral couple since the early 1970's when the Samoan Commission was first established in the Cal-Pac Conference to be more inclusive and welcoming of Pacific Islanders in the United Methodist denomination. From Reverend Misipati and Levaivanu Karapani's recollections:

- 1963: Reverend Lutelu entered the scene and approached the United Methodist Church to begin the Samoan language ministries in Southern California
- 1969: Reverend Faaagi Taufetee was appointed to Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Kalihi, Hawai'i. From there, he helped other Samoan men attain their local pastor's licensing and Samoan churches flourished and communities built up at Parker UMC, Olive UMC, Palolo UMC, Aiea UMC and Waianae UMC—all on the island of O'ahu, Hawai'i. These did not include the churches already begun on the mainland in Southern California and under the watchful care of Reverend Dr. Mila Maefau.
- 1973: The Samoan Commission was established by an act of the then, Southern California-Arizona Annual Conference under the authority of the Discipline of the United Methodist Church.

[52] Reverend Misipati and Levaivanu Karapani, Phone Interview.

- 1979: the name of the commission was changed to "The Pacific Islanders Commission" of the California-Pacific Annual Conference (to include not only Samoans, but also Tongans, Fijians, and other PI groups within the Cal-Pac Conference)

The purpose of the Commission:

To promote the full participation of the Pacific Islanders in the California Pacific Annual Conference of the United Methodist and to be opened to consultation with the resident Bishop concerning all matters affecting the Pacific Islanders ministry on the Mainland and the Pacific (Amended 1996).[53]

Reverend Misipati Karapani is a pillar in the Samoan community. His dynamic style of preaching and engaging the congregation to journey through the Gospel through his storytelling, led many of the men in his congregation at Waianae United Methodist, to complete the lay ministry course and even become pastors in the local church. Reverend Karapani exclaims,

> The Matai system creates many barriers that block the growth and thriving work of not only the *aiga,* family; but spills over into the *ekalesia,* congregation and ministries, as well as the *aganu'u,* Samoan community. There are a lot of issues we have faced as a people, and it is difficult as ministers because we grow up in a culture that believes and is founded on faith in God … *""le musumusuga ole agaga""*—whispering of the Holy Spirit upon one's heart and nudging of the Spirit. The goodness of God has provided so much for me and my family and especially our Samoan people—but we allow one thing, *fa'amamaluina o fafine e tala'ina le tala lelei.* We hinder and stop women from proclaiming the Word of God and their many gifts because they are female.
>
> However, we must remember, *""So'o se mea e finagalo ai le Atua, e leai se mea e faigata.""* In other words, "whatever God desires, there is no difficulty or hindrance that can stop it.[54]

Currently in the California-Pacific Conference, there now exists only six Samoan language ministries: Fetu Ao UMC-Torrance, California; Garden Grove UM-Garden Grove, California;

[53] Revised By-Laws of the Pacific Islanders Commission of the California-Pacific Annual Conference, February 19, 1997.

[54] Reverend Misipati and Levaivanu Karapani, Phone Interview.

*Silverado UMC-Long Beach, California; Aiea UMC-Aiea, Hawai'i; Pacific Islanders UMC-Palolo, Hawai'i, and *Olive UMC-Wahiawa, Hawai'i.[55] The numbers of membership and lay or clergy leaders have dwindled and currently have only four active Samoan ministries from a once thriving and growing membership. As Reverend Misipati Karapani shared with great sadness: "The Samoan churches have not been growing because of the lack of recruitment in ministry; we as elders should have recruited young people and leaders during our time but now, there are no new ones continuing the ministry. It is difficult now because there are no more pastors—we are in need and especially to revive the current churches while looking to the future."[56]

Faletua: The Role of the Supporter

A *faletua* title is given to the two highest roles for women in the Samoan culture and both play a significant role in the success or demise of a family, village, church, and extended family. The first role of *faletua,* wife of a clergyman, gives authority to the woman as leader of the women's group in the church, village, and district or area that her husband serves as minister. She takes the lead on organizing the *A'oga Aso Sa,* Sunday School ministry for children and women; as the *Tina ole Mafutaga o le Au Uso,* Leader for the Minister's Wives Group.

Mrs. Levaivanu Afasene Tali Karapani has served in this role and capacity since 1977. As the wife and life partner to Reverend Misipati Karapani, she shares that there is no greater role than this, and she is so thankful to serve God, her husband, and others in this capacity. Levaivanu was born in Vatia, Amerika Samoa, and is 74 years old. She is the second eldest of 10 siblings and a mother figure to her many nieces and nephews that live throughout the Pacific

[55] (*) Indicates Samoan Churches that do not participate in the Pacific Islanders Commission of the California-Pacific Conference.

[56] Reverend Misipati Karapani, Phone Interview with author.

Islands. Levaivanu began working at a very young age, and later married her sweetheart, Misipati, before moving to Honolulu, Hawai'i to begin their lives together and raise their three children: Reupena, Misipati Jr., and Leilani Olive. As *faletua*, she not only serves as the pastor's wife, but is the mother figure and spiritual parent to all families and children regardless of blood relationship or not. With that in mind, she has always carried the spirit of Mary, mother of Jesus, with her—to care, comfort, support, and pray for all people at all times; trusting in God at all times through his son, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to lead and guide and uplift more young people, especially young women, to answer their call to ministry as a preacher, teacher, supporter, or servant leader. All of these are God's gifts to women, and so all glory and honor return to God.[57]

As the *faletua* of the Paramount Chief, *Alii*, she is the leader to which all other women in the village and extended family looks to for direction, guidance, and support. Mrs. Jacinta Maria Afasene, wife of High Talking Chief Uta shares in her role as a *tausi*, similar to that of a *faletua:*

> I am grateful for my supportive role to my husband, High Talking Chief Uta, and take it very seriously. I am humbled and am always aware of the familial hierarchy and responsibilities placed upon our shoulders, especially when families from around the globe gather to celebrate the life of a relative. Those moments are often stressful and mournful; people's emotions are elevated, but through prayer and the grace of God, my husband and I hope our presence, financial support, and words of comfort and strength are able to lighten their load and direct a fair, loving, and honorable service to the *aiga*..[58]

The unique role of the *faletua* is being redefined daily in our home. My husband and I have a unique relationship as we blend two cultures together, as first-generation children born in the United States of America. It is a learning experience for my husband and me because of the

[57] Reverend Misipati and Levaivanu Karapani, Phone Interview.
[58] Mrs. Jacinta Maria Afasene, Phone Interview with the author on February 1, 2020.

bi-cultural marriage and duties we carry as both pastors, pastor's children, and in the Samoan and Tongan cultures who respect and honor them very differently.

Undertaking this project has helped to discover that there is a lack of information, research, or studies to indicate the historical or cultural beginnings of this role and how to engage, interact, or live it out, especially since both my husband and I are clergy. Also, these roles are not very prominent in biblical stories and therefore, I believe the *fa'asamoa*, Samoan way of life, is only now scratching the surface on this delicate role in ministry. Being married to a clergyman who is a Pacific Islander is one thing. It is an entirely new scope and chapter in the book of *Alofa* (Love), how to maneuver a marriage, let alone a congregation, and especially a Samoan community/village, *atunu'u*, or extended family, *aiga potopoto.*

Serving as a clergywoman is a feat of its own. However, serving alongside my husband who is also a minister to his own congregation, and is willing to confront/overcome the stereotypes associated with "male-ness" and also embrace the role of a *faletua* is a tapestry of love and devotion. All of the duties of a *faletua* that are typically performed by a woman, such as housework, babysitting, caring for the children, cooking, cleaning, and chores to name a few, are completed by my husband. While he also serves as my partner in ministry—he has willingly taken the role of *faletua,* and caregiver. This new dynamic stems from the merging of both our cultural worlds and the creation of a new one as we live bi-culturally in America. He also affords me the privilege to pursue my clergy role and further my education exploring the contextualization of the Samoan culture and women in ministry.

In 2011, I was accepted into seminary and began my journey through the M.Div. program at the Claremont School of Theology (CST). One year later, I married my *manamea*, my soul mate and best friend. While in my second year at CST, my husband worked to support our

family and sustain us through my educational goals. Upon graduating from CST, I was appointed to serve as pastor for a church in Hawai'i. Once again, my husband supported God's call in my life and we moved across the Pacific Ocean to begin my ministry on Kaua'i. There, he was able to sustain us and created a small business to support our family. After two year, when he realized I was stable and the church was supportive in my efforts as a clergywoman, he answered his call to ministry and moved to CST in Claremont, California. In my third year, we lived apart for the year while he studied in seminary and pursued his educational goals.

Through the supportive efforts of our conference and Bishop, I requested to be appointed to a church near Claremont so that I could support him and complete my duties as *faletua.* Upon completion of my husband's second year in seminary, he himself was called and appointed to a local church near Claremont School of Theology. Willingly, he answered 'YES' and began serving while finishing his M.Div. Thus began our journey in support of one another and all of the ministries we've been called to serve—thus weaving another layer of God's intricate promise within our lives.

The move to California opened another opportunity to continue my studies in the doctorate program at CST. Without hesitation, my husband encouraged it, and therefore I was accepted and began my studies once more. My loving and adorning pastor-husband served not only his church, but got another small business license to make ends meet for our young family. His role as *faletua* never ceased and by God's grace and my *manamea's* promise, we were blessed with our daughter. Her unexpected arrival once again affirmed God's blessings upon our lives; when I was able to take a semester off from school to care for her; while my pastor-husband graduated from seminary completed his M.Div. Thanks be to God!

The collaborative efforts put into the marriage is a necessity as voyaging through unchartered territory is required. As a bi-cultural couple with no exploration within the other's ethnic upbringing; navigating through the unknown was a test in faith and trust in God's divine direction and guidance in our lives. Alan Howard defines it best in *Samoan Coping Behavior: Samoan Coping Strategies,* "Cultural contact almost invariably produces, over a period of time, a myriad of new possibilities for most of the individuals it engages, just as it generates new problems."[59] Howard goes on to say, "For this reason I prefer the concept of *cultural diversification* to refer to the processes of relevance to Samoan coping behavior."[60] As a couple, we made the decision to honor first and foremost God and our individual call to ministry; then we would continue with care and consideration for our family. Howard explains this further,

> It is difficult for someone steeped in Western individualism to grasp the Samoan idea that the smallest political unit is a family group. The family [aiga] is regarded not as a plurality of individual opinions, but as a single political organism. True it may have internal parts: its old people providing experience, its young people acting as arms and legs, and its chief being the central brain for formulating decisions. The strength of such a body depends, however, not on individual rights but on how effectively these organs perform their different functions collectively. Any glory gained by the family is share equally by all.[61]

Therefore, as a bi-cultural couple learning to maneuver and shift in our beautiful and complicated marriage filled with color, vibrancy, and joy; we push on with assurance as Paul testifies to the Ephesians 3:20, "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to

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[59] Alan Howard, "Samoan Coping Behavior: Samoan Coping Strategies," in *The Changing Samoan: Behavior and Health in Transition,* eds. Paul T. Baker, Joel M. Hanna, and Thelma S. Baker (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 395.

[60] Howard, "Samoan Coping Behavior: Samoan Coping Strategies," 395.

[61] Howard, "Samoan Coping Behavior: Samoan Coping Strategies," 401.

accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

All of these components create a unique sphere that ignites my desire to provide support to future young women, all women, discerning their call to ministry, to know who they can call for support, mentorship, scholarship, and pastoral care. They do not have to travel the journey alone. Even as my research has led me to believe that within the thousands of women who currently serve as clergy in the UMC, there currently does not exist another Samoan or Samoan-American woman serving as pastor, missionary, chaplain, or in special ministries. I am a woman, grateful to be the daughter of a pastor, the wife of a pastor, and daughter in love of a pastor; there has never been a shortage of prayer warriors and compassion caregivers in my life. Still in the 21st century, women are not ordained as clergy or allowed to "lead the church" in many Protestant churches, specifically in the Pacific Islands.

This project focuses on the Samoan context, though there may be many similarities with other Pacific Islander cultures. This project provides a space for dialogue using compassion-based methods to share narratives, stories, of the journey of many Samoan-American and Pacific Islanders, both women and men, clergy and lay, so that the younger generations gain understanding on the struggles that those who came before us endured. Their pain then becomes the next generation's gain—though many of the younger generations of today lack understanding of the hardships endured by their parents and grandparents. For one to share their personal story, one must learn and know their history. The story of those who voyaged from the home islands long ago and settled into the foreign lands now called America. As Manfred Ernst notes, "It would be hard to find any other nation in the world where society and the churches are so closely

interwoven, and where the historic mainline churches have had and still have such a great impact on nearly every aspect of life, as Samoa."[62]

Many of the Samoan Christian denominations continue to uphold patriarchal structures that subjugate women and maintain a stance of inferiority to the males (men) in their families, household, villages, and *aiga potopoto,* extended family. Ilisapeci Meo explains, "The societies of the Pacific Islands are all, in varying degrees, patriarchal. This patriarchal structure has been encouraged and strengthened by Christianity, thereby further legitimizing the oppression of women."[63] Meo goes on to emphasize, "Culture is a dynamic process; in reality all cultures are subject to continual change, and this includes the roles of women. Our Christian faith should be a primary catalyst for ushering in needed cultural changes in relation to women."[64] The role of women as facilitators and intervenors not only in faith, but also in the home, village, and in all areas of the family and *fa'asamoa,* is vital in the cultivation of leaders in the community, family, culture, and political spheres.

Ilisapeci Meo goes on to explain that women are still not welcomed into the pulpit or given opportunities to lead; "In the Pacific, 'women's situation' varies somewhat in the different island groups. Women may influence the decision-making processes in some matrilineal societies of the Pacific Islands; however, their influence is still limited as men usually make the final decisions."[65] Protestant churches that do not ordain or limit the exposure and use of women at the pulpit include The United Church of Christ (UCC), Methodist Church of Samoa (MCS),

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[62] Manfred Ernst, *Globalization and the Re-Shaping of Christianity in the Pacific Islands* (Suva The Pacific Theological College, 2006), 547.

[63] Meo, *Asserting Women,* 150.

[64] Meo, *Asserting Women,* 150.

[65] Meo, *Asserting Women,* 152.

Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano i Amerika Samoa (EFKAS) also known as the Congregational Christian Church in American Samoa (CCCAS), Samoan Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Samoan Independent Seventh Day Adventist Church (SISDAC), and Katoliko (Catholic) churches, to name a few. Marie Ropeti explains: "If ordination is the highest calling offered by the churches for its members for mission, then why is it that only the men in some Pacific churches are offered that opportunity? Why is it that women are not suitable for that call?"[66]

The Samoan culture highly respects and adores women in every aspect of life: church, family, home, politics, and the village. However, there are a few positions, such as the pastor of a church or until recent years, lead the family as a *Matai*, the highest ranking title in a family lineage, often times equivalent to that of a pastor or clergy role.

This project provides a resource for Samoan-American Christian churches, especially those in the United Methodist Church, to cultivate a culture of acceptance and support for young women discerning their call to ministry, and provide resources to navigate through the tedious and often strenuous process one must endure to complete ordination process.

This project is part of a larger development and aims to provide a way for difficult conversations and dialogue to begin; especially between the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd generations in a Samoan or Polynesian aiga. The implementation of resources for current leaders, pastors, and congregations with women, both young and seasoned, to discern their call to ministry; and how not to simply hear their call, but to "take thou authority" and live in-to their calling. Whether it is to serve, nurture, care, and empower others, this project is on-going. Most importantly it is a part of the Christ's mission begun long ago, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,

[66] Ropeti, "A Biblical Basis for the Ordination of Women in the Pacific," 136.

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."[67]

Author, Tamara Wete writes, "Motherhood has traditionally been a very important aspect of women's identity in every culture . . . and reflect[ing] on the meaning of motherhood as *woman's identity,* with special reference to the Kanaky (New Caledonia) context.[68] Tamara Wete goes on to say, "Women of today stand at a crossroads with regard to motherhood, owing to the societal changes and developments. One path takes them along the way of tradition, another path, which is more confusing for many women, takes them along the way of modern feminist thought. In some ways, this second path is a path to their own identity crisis."[69]

Faatuatua ile Atua: Trust in God

Women have been serving in the United Methodist Church since its early beginnings, even before the merger between the United Brethren Church and Methodists took place. Helenor M. Davisson was ordained a deacon in the Methodist Protestant Church in 1866; Anna Howard Shaw was ordained in the 1880 in the Methodist Protestant Church after being refused ordination by the General Conference of the Methodist-Episcopal Church in 1880.[70] More women later followed suite. Women began answering their call to serve God in various capacities: as deacon,

[67] Matthew 28:19-20 (NRSV).

[68] Tamara Wete, "Motherhood: Feminist, Cultural and Theological Perspectives," in *Weavings: Women Doing Theology in Oceania*, eds. by Lydia Johnson and Joan Alleluia Filemoni-Tofaeono (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 2003), 49.

[69] Wete, *Motherhood: Feminist,* 49.

[70] "Women Ordained," United Methodist Church, accessed October 20, 2019. https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-when-did-the-church-first-ordain-women

missionary, elder, local pastor and lay speakers. According to the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of the United Methodist Church, there has been a dramatic increase in clergywomen at every level, from local pastors to bishops, nearly 12, 300 United Methodist clergywomen serve since 2016.[71]

The practice of women answering their call to ministry is not new. However, having Samoan and Samoan-American women come forward publicly to answer their call to serve God is new. Not only as a cultural clash that many protestant denominations do not accept but even within the UMC, Samoan women are few and far in between. One might wonder why, when many serve on committees within the local church, community, and boards. Samoan women are physicians, politicians, lawyers, and teachers, and so much more. But very few have dared to challenge the ancient cultural ways and religious views that women do not belong in the pulpit.

The wave of clergywomen in the Samoan culture began to take shape long ago, and now young women who've grown up in the church, lived faithful lives in serving, caring, and supporting the youth group, young adult ministry, sang in the choir, and creatively engaged in the life of church, are now the surf riders, propelling and riding the waves. Those same surfers—women now ask, "Is God *really* calling me to serve as a pastor?" Yes!

This project challenges not only the cultural values and traditions of the *Fa'asamoa,* it also calls out the problems currently faced by leaders in the language ministries who do not understand how to provide care and support for those women answering "yes" to God. This project identifies the ripples that were formed long ago by those who came before us to stir the waters, which now bellows out forming waves for the next generation to ride out and explore.

[71] GBHEM, "Clergywomen Leaders."

CHAPTER TWO

What alternative theologies can help give voice to Samoan women?

Women have had a long history of being a part of something greater, beyond themselves. Faafouina Iofi reinforces the widely held belief that "Samoan cultural values can be integrated with Christian understanding to help Samoans affirm the best in their cultural heritage. It will encourage them [Samoans] to make a relevant contribution toward the enrichment of life in the communities and churches to which they belong."[72] The *fa'asamoa,* Samoan way of living, does not believe culture and identity are separate. They are one and the same, and identify as: *O A'u ole Samoa,* I am Samoan. This phrase carries not only the physical identity of a person, but the [her]story of her parents, family, grandparents, and the generations of the past, present, and future. Altogether, a person carries the rich [her]story of who they are, where they come from, and never forget their roots; their *aiga,* family. Duncan Forrester explains, "In the family a child receives powerful messages and examples of the kinds of behavior which are regarded as good and acceptable. Through being loved, we learn to love. Through being trusted, we learn to trust. Through being treated reasonably and gently, we learn how to handle anger, aggression and frustration." It takes a village to raise a child is not just a saying, rather it emphasizes the significance of the *aiga,* family, and that no [wo]man is left to fend for herself.

Such is the theological framework created by Pacific Islander women, better known as *Manahine Pasefika.* The Association of Oceania Women Theologians gathered and "combined the Oceaninan word, *mana,* meaning 'sacred power,' with the root of the word for 'woman' in several island languages – *hi'ne,* or *i'ne,* to create a new word that speaks of our commitment to

[72] Iofi, "Samoan Culture*,"* 32.

the sacred power and empowerment of Pacific Islander women.[73] These women formed a collegial leadership structure of coordinators to response and recruit Oceanian women theologians and create awareness and support for those who are called not only to the local church, but to the world. *Manahine Pasefika,* also known as The Association of Oceanian Women Theologians (AOWT) is a network of theologically trained Pacific Islander women who are 'making their voices heard' through the publishing of contextual theology and liberative, prophetic study materials for laity in their churches, especially for women and youth.[74]

Like the challenges faced by Samoan-American women in ministry, there have been hundreds if not more, women who have experienced discrimination, put-downs, and sometimes physical abuse because they choose to answer their call to ministry and serve God. Leontine Ruth Turpeau Current Kelly was the first African American woman bishop to be elected in The United Methodist Church, or any mainline denomination in the world.[75] Her experience as a wife, mother, daughter of a pastor, granddaughter of a pastor, and seminary student is a miraculous testament to God's faithfulness—especially when one lays aside all doubts, fears, and transgressions, to follow God. Bishop Leontine Kelly did not see how she could enroll at Wesley full time. The day she accepted her call, she remembers saying: "Lord I don't want to bargain with you, but I would love to be a trained minister. But with John David [her son] enrolling in college, there is no money for me to attend seminary."[76] Then a year later, she had another interesting experience. Bishop Leontine Kelly recalls walking into Union Theological

[73] "Educating the Oceanian Women," Global Ministries, accessed September 15, 2019, https://www.globalministries.org.

[74] "Manahine Pasefika-The Association of Oceanian Women Theologians," Global Ministries, accessed September 15, 2019, https://www.globalministries.org.

[75] Current, *Breaking Barriers,* 17.

[76] Current, *Breaking Barriers,* 88.

Seminary's registrar office and asked one of the professors standing in for the registrar, "Do you have any Presbyterian money with Methodist written on it?" He replied, "Yes, we do!"[77] Bishop Leontine Kelly was rewarded with a $2500 scholarship to help her begin her studies; all the while, her children were still in college and earning their own degrees. She never gave up. Through her struggles and caring for her children and family, she relied on God and his power to carry her through the storm. Her answer to pursuing her seminary degree at a much older age was filled with trust and conviction: "I don't' know how it will be done, but I know that God will take care of it, that God will work it out! God did work it out, beyond anybody's expectations!"[78]

This passion and faith lies within all women. There is a driving force that is enacted when there is injustice, obstacles, difficulties, and hindrances that may dissuade someone from their call to ministry—but once realized that there is a greater power at work within her, anything is possible. In the UMC, women have been serving since the beginning of the Methodist movement. As preachers, deacons, and eventually as pulpit ministers and ordained clergy, women have impacted the way ministry and mindfulness go hand in hand.

Uiga o le Tama'ita'i/Tina: Gender Roles for Women

The *fa'asamoa,* the Samoan way, is structured around the family unit. This is not in comparison to the western thought or society's definition of family or unit however, *aiga,* family, is of the utmost important in a Samoan's life. This is because the immediate family, *aiga,* provides the foundation and support for the extended family, directing, guiding, and instilling not only the families values; but also lay the groundwork for members of every age group learn how to respect, *faaaloalo,* and *ava,* honor the elders of the *aiga,* family. Faafouina Iofi explains,

[77] Current, *Breaking Barriers*, 88.
[78] Current, *Breaking Barriers*, 89.

> It is here that a child learns the rules of good etiquette and proper manners. It is here that a child learns the right language to use when addressing an elder and how to behave before a titleholder. It is in the immediate family that the children learn the proper way to sit, to speak, to walk, to lie down, to eat, to drink or to carry on a conversation with their senior. Also, it is here that a child learns the value of sharing, the importance of mutual cooperation and caring concern for their ‘“aiga”” (relatives).[79]

Women are the key to holding an *aiga,* family, together. As a wife, mother, and caregiver, the *fa'asamoa* ascertains the wife's duties include giving good advice, make suggestions, care for her husband and children, and take care of the home. The rest are the man's duties and responsibilities. Within the *aiga,* chronological order is rule, and the father has the last say. Mothers, women, may have a say when asked, but not warranted or solicited. Hence the difficulty that carries over when women begin to serve in leadership roles; not only in the church, but in society and the political realm. This shift and unprecedented role reversal is not only new, it goes against years of tradition and reaps havoc within families, villages, and the way of life.

Claire Slatter explains, "Women's inequality and subordination in society is [sic] one of the main factors contributing to violence against women."[80] Slatter goes on to explain that the frequent threat of violence and other forms of intimidation against women are the principal means by which men keep women 'in their place' (as second-class people) and maintain male domination and control.[81] This mindset is one that is present in most of Polynesia however, was brought about by the colonization of the islands, when the cultural traditions and practices were banned and deemed 'of the devil'—and the creation of the "woman" from Adam, the first "man." Prior to the invasion of the Christian missionaries to the islands of Samoa, although

[79] Iofi, "Samoan Culture*,"* 56.
[80] Meo, *Asserting Women,* 152.
[81] Meo, *Asserting Women,* 152.

barbaric ways were lived, there was an inherent equality amongst the males and females and they identified as one body, one family, *Aiga e tasi.*

The *fa'asamoa* affirms the family as one unit; and is intricately woven to identify a person. The individual is then no longer represented as self, but as a whole; part of a family unit comprised of more parts layered and built as one, *fautasi le aiga.* Faafouina Iofi explains:

> The family in Samoan culture is immortal. The individual exists and dies but the family lives on. It is the family that gives individuals their identity and dignity. A Samoan does not ask philosophical questions to find out who he/she is. He or she knowns his/her identity through the family.[82]

Aiga means family, and family means no one is left behind. Although this practice, way of life, is displayed and lived by many Samoan families, there are still many issues that hinder the women from living out their fullest potential. The church in the Pacific Islands is still very much the domain of patriarchy.[83] Meo goes on to explain: "In terms of its leadership, decision making at all levels is male-dominated. Women in the church live by decisions made by men. The few women who participate in decision-making have a very minor impact. In one sense, we can say that these few women are co-opted by the patriarchal system."[84] Meresiana Soronakadavu writes, "The Scriptures point out that God created human beings in God's likeness, creating them male and female (Genesis 1:26-27), and does not show a superiority-inferiority relationship but God's intention for each to relate to the other."[85]

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[82] Iofi, "Samoan Culture*,"* 44.
[83] Meo, *Asserting Women,* 153.
[84] Meo, *Asserting Women,* 153.
[85] Meresiana Soronakadavu, "The Traditional Role of Fijian Women With Reference to Christian Justice," in *Weavings: Women Doing Theology in Oceania,* eds. by Lydia Johnson and Joan Alleluia Filemoni-Tofaeono (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific, 2003), 162.

There is no question that parental authority is waning in many families of present day Samoa. Especially with many of the first generation whose children are born overseas in the United States of America or abroad. Those who are first generation born face a multitude of challenges that the first generation did not face; and a lot of pressure is placed upon the shoulders of that generation. There are still Samoan families who believe in the traditional approach of *aiga*, family, and the *fa'asamoa,* Samoan way of life. However, the onslaught of Western views, lifestyle, and independence pave a new way of living for the next generations. Faafouina Iofi shares, "With the entrance of the Europeans into the isolated world of the Samoans in the beginning of the 18th century, changes swiftly began to emerge."[86]

Change in leadership and cultural traditions were practically eliminated after the missionaries arrived to the islands of Samoa. And while the Europeans believed to have brought the Gospel to the people in the islands—divulging the miracles of Jesus and trying to 'save the lost and weak,' many of the practices followed by the Pacific Islanders imitated that of Christ: cultivation of land and sea; compassion for the children; support was shared by all, not individually. Countries in Europe and other parts of the Pacific sent assistance to the Government of Western Samoa, while America continued to pour its resources to help Amerika Samoa. This division was inevitable for Samoa and continues still today: Samoa and Amerika Samoa. Faafouina Iofi explains, "the negative effect of some of these innovations has caused real concern in the minds of some of the traditional and church leaders about the future of Samoa and her unique way of life…if the present trend of progressive developments continues to accelerate without proper moral, cultural and spiritual preparation and adjustment, the Samoan Way of Life may soon be displaced by the dominant culture of the West if not outright rejected by her own

[86] Iofi, "Samoan Culture*,"* 63.

people."[87] This displacement has led many of the second and third generation born in America focus on making a living and growing a family here in the States. They are not focused on returning to the motherland where their parents were born and once lived. Their new home is now here, in the States (or abroad), where they learn how to straddle between two cultures, two worlds, bi-cultural identity, and bi-lingual world: creating a new culture, a new identity. The newness opens doors and challenges both culture and tradition. Mema Motusaga writes, "Most people value their culture, their beliefs and values as well as the cultural protocols. For Samoans, it is their culture which affords women a higher, more prestigious status than men."[88]

This *feagaiga,* sacred covenant that is upheld by the Samoan people is shown through the daily interactions and support of young women to further their studies in order to care for their parents and family. However, there is also push-back because the daughters, sisters, mothers, and wives are now exposed to roles they've never held before and are doing it well. Motusaga writes, "In the Samoan context, the traditional culture, the *fa'asamoa,* is something that acknowledges and embraces women . . . and introduces some of the factors that impact on and contradict the traditional beliefs, and how these factors may alter the current perception of the status of women in Samoan society today."[89] This project explores the new challenges that the second and third generation face, especially in today's society, as women are being called to ordained ministry; to serve as missionaries, chaplains, lead pastors of mega churches, evangelists, and leadership roles unlike ever before.

[87] Iofi, "Samoan Culture*,"* 65.

[88] Mema Motusaga, "Women in Decision Making in Samoa" (PhD diss., Victoria University, Victoria, Australia, 2016), 50.

[89] Motusaga, "Women in Decision," 50.

Aufaigaluega Paia: Clergy[woman] of the United Methodist Church

In the United Methodist denomination, 2020 marks 64 years of full clergy rights for Methodist women in the United States of America. Our founder, John Wesley, licensed women to preach, but their licenses were revoked not long after his death in 1791 and access to pulpits was intermittent in Methodism.[90] Women were called to preach in the early days of Wesley's pilgrimage but somewhere down the line, people found it not fit for women to preach or hold positions in authority or especially to proclaim the Gospel. Ellen Blue explains, "The process is historically complicated, but women did not have full connexion—ordination that equals the status of ordained males—in the Methodist Church in North America until 1956.[91]

As a woman, the doorway opened over fifty years ago into this beloved denomination for women to gain access to the pulpit. As a Samoan-American woman, the doorway is merely cracked open. Access is still denied and not fully opened to the idea of having a woman serve in a most prestigious and honorable role. Why not? Because she is a woman, created to be in partnership with her husband, and a mother, caregiver, caretaker, and quiet disciple. Generally speaking, the church in the Pacific Islands is still very much the domain of patriarchy.[92] Men hold leadership and positions of power and authority. Men also dominate decision making for the family, village, extended family, and the church. The areas where women's intuition and advice are sought are few and far in between and usually have no impact or weight in decision-making.

[90] Ellen Blue, "Should Theological Education be Different for Clergywomen? Doing 'Women's Work' in a Mainline Protestant Seminary," in *Women and Ordination in the Christian Churches,* eds. Ian Jones, Janet Wootton, and Kirsty Thorpe (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 66.

[91] Blue, "Should Theological Education be Different for Clergywomen?" 66.

[92] Meo, *Asserting Women,* 152.

Father Kevin Barr of Fiji shares, "The church is called to be the conscience of the society, and today our Pacific societies very much need a conscience."[93]

During this project and research, it was discovered that a Samoan woman, Penelope Alailima, member of the Methodist Church in American Samoa, left her homeland to pursue her studies at Claremont School of Theology. She graduated from Claremont School of Theology and served as pastor at Tolutasi United Methodist Church, under the leadership of Bishop Jack M. Tuell. I reached out to Penelope's granddaughter and namesake, Penelope, via facebook messenger and discovered that her father, was the son of the late Reverend Penelope Alailima. Unfortunately, this is where my research halted because of the lack of information available about Penelope and her journey towards ordination in the Samoan Methodist Church, and was able to serve for a while in America through the California-Pacific Conference; until she returned to her home country. She remained in American Samoan as the principal of a high school until her death.

The lack of information, research, and timing to interview Penelope's family was not possible during this project. However, through technology and communication via email—my hope is to continue searching and discovering Penelope's journey so that other Samoan and Samoan-American women are able to answer their call; not just to teach. But to serve God in the local church, as a missionary, as chaplain, and as ordained elders or deacons.

The struggle and resistance of women in leadership have birthed a movement within the Pacific Islander women to not only resist, but to fight back and earn a rightful place at the table. Women have gathered throughout the Pacific to form groups like *Manahine Pasefika* and *Weavings: Women Doing Theology in Oceania*, to advocate not only for their rights, but the

[93] Kevin Barr, *Let's Change the World* (Suva: Chevalier Publications, 1994), 153.

rights of future generation of women in ministry and leadership roles in the *Aiga* (family), *Ekalesia/Lotu* (Congregation and Church), *Atunu'u* (Village), *A'oga* (Education), and *Malo* (Government). This project focuses on providing a place where young Pacific Islander women, especially those of Samoan ancestry, can identify with, ask questions, and receive resources to help them answer their call to ministry.

CHAPTER THREE

Lumana'i Mo Tama'ita'i/Tina Samoa: A Way Forward for Samoan Women

The problem addressed by this project was the of resources, support, and opportunities for Samoan-American women to dialogue, be mentored, and receive encouragement and affirmation as they bring the fullness of their cultural identity in conversation with the call to leadership and pastoral ministry in the United Methodist Church. The main purpose of this project was to shed light and provide resources in support of a creative, unique, and safe space for Samoan-American women, especially young women, to discern, embrace, and answer their call to ministry within the United Methodist Church (UMC) denomination.

In an effort to provide the best use of resources and activities, this project was prepared and implemented through a youth and young adult camp during the month of June 2019. It not only provided awareness and empowerment for Samoan-American women, but to other young Pacific Islander women throughout the camp. It focused on Samoan, Tongan, Fijian, and Pacific Islander women and through the breakout sessions, dialogue, interaction and Q & A with the various women's empowerment movement to:

(i) Encourage them to discern their call, affirm their identities, and live out their faith in their cultural contexts;

(ii) Create a space for dialogue, change, and inclusion of women to be embraced by a culture that is rooted in the love of God and love for people;

(iii) Provide a safe space for young people (youth and young adults) to seek and explore their vocational aspirations with church and community leaders; and

(iv) Challenge and empower the next generations of Samoans, Tongans, Fijians and Pacific Islanders in their call to ministry while living authentically in a bi-cultural society.

Pre-Project Survey

A survey was created and distributed to women in the Samoan United Methodist Churches, and also to Tongan, Hawaiian, and Fijian women within the California Pacific Conference to collect their input as well as discern the level of their knowledge of their local church and denomination. 200 surveys were distributed and 185 were collected. The questions were categorized under the following subject heading:

1) The Process – to beginning one's call to ministry

2) Knowledge of the United Methodist polity

3) Education and knowledge of resources available to students of all ages

4) Local church

5) District and Conference Happenings

This survey helps identify the women and whether or not they are involved in any leadership roles within the local church. The pre-survey identifies potential leaders, and those who may be feeling some burnout. Overall, these questions provided insights into the minds and hearts of the Pacific Islander women currently attending a United Methodist church.

A'oa'o le Tama ma le Teine: Teach your Son and Daughter

An effort was made to maximize on time and space, and to contextualize the teachings so the young men and women can personalize the lessons and use them in their daily, practical lives. The Four Tasks of Practical Theological Interpretation by Richard Osmer were used to guide the workshops, and also to identify the level of growth necessary to help mentor the young

person through their journey. Osmer uses the four core tasks of practical theological interpretation to answer the following questions:[94]

- What is going on?
- Why is this going on?
- What ought to be going on?
- How might we respond?

This project is only a stepping stone to a larger project, in hopes of continuing on this study of weaving more women into ministry and providing safe spaces for all women to preach, teach, and empower others no matter their vocation. Dr. Marie Ropeti explains: "Some Pacific churches have accepted women for ordination; many women leave their own churches to gain ordination elsewhere. Some Pacific women are thus already practicing ministry, despite discrimination against their role by some church leaders."[95] As the pre-survey indicated, more than 50% of the women responded to already serving in some type of ministry in their local church: Sunday school teacher, choir conductor, pianist/organist, bell choir, youth worker, young adult liaison, hula dancer, praise and worship leader, and more. Dr. Ropeti goes on to say, "The churches which allow women to be ordained must share with others the quality of ministry and the empowerment of mission women bring to leadership."[96]

Although there are significant numbers of Pacific Island women who attend church, it does not mean that all of them agree with one another. There are still those who believe wholeheartedly that women are the support system, the *faletua,* to their husbands; not as the leaders of the church, or at the pulpit. To them, we applaud their obedience and love. However, this project focuses on the desire to *valaau,* call out, and *loto toa,* be of strong heart, so that the

[94] Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Wm.B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2008), 4.

[95] Ropeti, "A Biblical Basis for the Ordination of Women in the Pacific," 139.

[96] Ropeti, "A Biblical Basis for the Ordination of Women in the Pacific," 138.

young women who've never seen anyone like them, will be the example for others in generations to come.

Again, this project only scratches the surface on weaving together the generational gap between Samoan-American women and how to answer their call to ministry and serving God. As Osmer identifies as the four core tasks:

- *The descriptive-empirical task.* This first step helps us discern the patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations or contexts.[97] The first step designed with two guest speakers-both Samoan-American clergywomen to discuss and share their journey into ministry. It is the first stop of the rotation where young Pacific Islander women gather information about answering God's call as a pastor—and what that might look like. This first step helps us discern the
- *The interpretive task.* This task draws on theories of the arts and sciences to better understand and explain why these patterns and dynamics are occurring.[98] This next step explores various possibilities within the denomination and all that comes with it. It is where the young women not only ask real questions about the process of ordination, but explore the different types of contextual ministries through campus ministries like the Wesley Foundation, Wesley Circles, and much more. To engage in this task, the young women are allowed to be all hands on deck with three different speakers involved in this section: A Campus Minister, Missionary, Lay Minister, and Youth Worker are the resource persons for this task.

[97] Osmer, *Practical Theology,* 4.
[98] Osmer, *Practical Theology,* 4.

- *The normative task* uses theological concepts to interpret particular episodes, situations, or contexts, constructing ethical norms to guide our responses, and learning from "good practice."[99] In this group, there will be women seminarians of both Samoan and Tongan ancestry to answer questions about applying to seminary and what the process of becoming a certified candidate means.
- *The pragmatic task* is last and determines strategies of action that will influence situations in ways that are desirable and enter into a reflective conversation with the "talk back" emerging when they are enacted.[100] This task is designed with several retired Pacific Islands' female clergy to share and answer questions one on one with young women.

These four tasks will help the young women (and men) constitute the basic structure of practical theological interpretation."[101] During these times, it is of the utmost importance that women not only discover their call, but also understand the sacrifice, sweat, and tears of completing their call and seeing it through fruition. Dr. Ropeti explains, "The increasing gravity of discrimination against women across the Pacific requires a more integrated and proactive approach."[102] This project is a step towards a more interactive, powerful, and welcoming space where all young Samoan-American women and Pacific Islander women can join and participate. Given this problem, I've created a ministerial intervention that includes Osmer's Four Tasks of Practical Theology, as a means to delve deep into the psyche of these Samoan-American young women

[99] Osmer, *Practical Theology,* 4.
[100] Osmer, *Practical Theology,* 4.
[101] Osmer, *Practical Theology,* 4.
[102] Ropeti, "A Biblical Basis for the Ordination of Women in the Pacific," 138.

and men. This project also provides opportunities for dialogue to be shared and embraced for change to occur.

Workshops during a Pacific Islanders Youth & Young Adult Camp

The Pacific Islanders Youth & Young Adults Camp is a gathering of young men and women of Samoan and Tongan ancestry. The age levels for this camp ranged between 16-40 years old. There was a mixture of men and women ranging between single, engaged, married, divorced—across the board who participated in this project. However, those who were included in the survey and counted included only young Samoan-American women (approximately 25) and the rest of the population of women were Tongan-American (approximately 85), totaling 115. The remaining numbers include the men and boys included in the camp.

Room 1: Maliu Mai-The Gathering Space (Descriptive-Empirical Task)

What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? How might we respond?

- Two Samoan-American clergywomen share their stories in this section. Both are married to Pacific Islander men. One is a United Methodist pastor, the other is a pastor in the United Church of Christ/Disciples of Christ. They share their individual journeys culturally, as wives who now pastor and serve in a church; and how their husbands, who are both pastors, deal with this gift.

  The presentations are followed by a session of Question and Answer.

Each group had approximately 25-28 people. A good sized group that spent 1.5 hours together. These sessions allowed for the interactions between the young women and clergywomen; and the conversations were a great place to start. A video of cultural clash and the lack of support for

women in ministry was played to put the conversation in its historical context. The group was very attentive to the speakers and asked questions relevant to the group and individuals.

What can I re-design so that it can be implemented for the next group/generation?

Making the conversations and interactions interactive, including a live zoom feed for others, or pod cast, so that it could be livestreamed while things happen. This can grow a larger audience and help to keep the Gen Z included and invested.

What can this project do to help strengthen the ministries for women?

Hariesa Faitala shares that in 1999, she received a letter from her church's Executive Committee informing her that she has been requested to come and serve as their parish minister.[103] She was elated and her response was, "I will accept the challenge and with God's help I can cope."[104] God continues to move mountains, open windows, and allow the Spirit to blow where it needs to blow. May that same Spirit continue to strengthen us and provide for us always!

Room 2: Talanoa-Let's Talk Story (The Interpretive Task)

What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? How might we respond?

This task draws on theories of the arts and sciences to better understand and explain why these patterns and dynamics are occurring.[105] This step explores the possibilities available to serve within the denomination. Young women will be able to explore the different types of contextual

[103] Faitala, "Journey To A Forbidden Land: My Life In God's Service," 202.
[104] Faitala, "Journey To A Forbidden Land: My Life In God's Service," 203.
[105] Osmer, *Practical Theology,* 4.

ministries through campus ministries like the Wesley Foundation, Wesley Circles, and much more.

- A Campus Minister: Share and interpret how they became a campus minister and where?
    - Difference between Campus ministry and local church?
    - Difference between Campus ministry and Missionary work?
- Lay Minister: What is this and what do you do with it?
- Missionary: How long is a mission served? Do we get to choose where we serve? How old can I be to serve as a missionary?
- Youth Worker and all its glory – serving at the local church level and also at district level

What did I learn from this project? Talanoa.

Let's talk story was based on the different leaders that shared about their own journey through seminary and how they came to realize that's where God was calling them. The questions that were asked by the young people were intriguing because many had no idea that these were "pastoral" roles. In fact, 90% of the Pacific Islands campers thought 'pastor' only meant pulpit ministry. There was no inclination that clergy meant you serve anywhere else except the church.

This was a revelation because so many young people have not been given the resources to explore what "ministry" means—and it challenges me to seek better communication not only with my peers, but also with the first generation leaders and pastors who are not teaching about this. We ALL serve a living God who is able to do for us and through us, more than we can ever imagine.

What wasn't present that I can change?

The pastors and leaders of the churches these young people attend were not present. Having this section and a bridge to the pastoral leadership team next time around can help build communication between the first and second generations. I believe having both the young and seasoned present at the table, will help to make all things right.

What can I re-design so that it can be implemented for the next group/generation?

Ilisapeci Meo writes in Luke 18:1-8, where we learn of a God of justice through the story of a woman who seeks justice and as she stands up and claims her rights. Meo describes the woman as a widow, the object of oppression, and a victim of injustice that no one was addressing. Meo lifts her up as "a fitting model for us as women of the Pacific."[106] She continues, "The 'voice' for women's rights in the church is still lagging far behind the rest of society. The question we must ask is why it is taking so long for the church to affirm women's dignity and equal rights."[107]

What can this project do to help strengthen the ministries for women?

This project helps strengthen the voices of young Samoan and Tongan women. It gives them tools to use, and empowers them to know they are not alone in this fight. Meo writes,

> It is ""knowledgeable women"" in the church who will know how to speak for themselves. Such women in the Pacific need to know how to speak not only for themselves but also on behalf of all women. We need to be knowledgeable in order to be effective in all that we do. We need to be well informed about church issues as well as secular issues. We need to know about the economic and political life of our own society. We need to know about the struggle of women workers, and the pain of women who are daily experiencing violence and sexual abuse. We need to understand the causes of suicide, drug abuse, and other

[106] Meo, *Asserting Women*, 154.
[107] Meo, *Asserting Women*, 154.

> problems among our youth. We need to know about policies and laws concerning women's rights. We need to know about our church structures that marginalize us as women. We need to know how men have interpreted theology and the Bible in the past and how they can be reinterpreted today by women.[108]

Knowledge is power, and power from God is energizing and created to be dispersed not kept hidden. James 3:17 states, "But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere." With wisdom and guidance from God and leaders who are open, affirming, and passionate—*talanoa* will continue to grow and more people will join in the conversations—realizing the power within them already exists.

Room 3: *Misiona*-The Mission (The Normative Task)

What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? How might we respond?

- This group will explore theological concepts to interpret particular episodes, situations, or contexts, constructing ethical norms to guide their responses
- This group will practice what it means and how to make "good practice."[109]
- Featured in this section of *Misiona: The Mission,* are Seminarians of both Samoan-American and Tongan ancestry and also a Pacific Islander female Chaplain (in a hospital)
- This group will share questions, concerns, and how-to for applying to seminary

What did I learn from this project?

This group gathered and listened to the women who engaged the young women's group first with an icebreaker followed by a scenario. They were interactive with this group and each

[108] Meo, *Asserting Women*, 155.
[109] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

shared their names, a few of their favorite things, and finally, why they are at camp. Each participant shared and did not hold back. Many were struggling with answering - "yes to God" because they felt unworthy, unprepared, and that leadership was simply not for them. This interpretive task gave each participant the opportunity to express their relationship with God and then with others in any creative way they chose.

Some displayed their love and hate relationships through dance and song; others drew and shared their drawings. Still others used mime and sign language to express their deepest thoughts. I noticed that all the participants shared regardless of their fears. What made this section different was the choice given to share their interpretation of God, of self, and of someone they truly love and admire. The mission for this group was to BREAKOUT!

-Breakout of their old habits!

-Breakout of their fears!

-Breakout of their shyness!

-Breakout of their bubbles!

-Breakout of the lies that keep them bound!

-Breakout of the pains of the past!

These were a few of the things displayed so that the team's *misiona*, (mission), was clear and available to embrace the Holy Spirit.

What wasn't present that I can change?

I noticed the space allotted for this group was limiting. Because of the nature of 'freedom' given to the participants, a larger space would suffice so that each person does not feel cramped or that

it takes away from their personal experience. When space is made available, then all participants find comfort in knowing they are not being constricted in any way.

Duplicate? This task was different from the others, especially because of the dancing and being open to try and explore the ways shared by those leading.

Reassess? Besides the space, time limit per person can be adjusted because of the nature of this group.

What can I re-design so that it can be implemented for the next group/generation?

I felt this group was able to express themselves more freely than the first two sections. However, as shared, the time limitation may have to be adjusted because some of the members shared longer than the others; yet all were deeply meaningful.

Osmer explains that in practical theology, often results in courses that focus exclusively on one form of ministry like preaching, pastoral care, or Christian education—what gets lost in this educational pattern is the interconnectedness of ministry in the congregational system and the congregation's interaction with its context.[110] This very group, *Misiona: The Mission*, really allowed for the group and participants to open up and see their interconnectedness with one another and vulnerability in sharing with each other. There was no holding back once they believed it was a safe space and trustworthy; thereby releasing all of their anxieties and abiding in the Spirit.

What can this project do to help strengthen the ministries for women?

[110] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 15.

The ability to 'cast your burdens unto Jesus' is something that women can do more of, releasing, letting go, giving it up to Jesus—so he can fill women with peace, everlasting joy, and love. Too often young women, especially those who are nearing graduation, feel tense and afraid of failure. But God assures his people, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And I am with you always, to the very end of the age."[111]

Room 4: *Faatuatua:* Faith (The Pragmatic Task)

What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? How might we respond?

- As the final task group of the project, this is the place that determines strategies of action that will influence situations in ways that are desirable
- It is a time to enter into a reflective conversation
- It is a time to affirm and empower the young woman that she is not alone on her journey, and that she is covered by all of the women in her *aiga,* and *aiga potopoto.*
- Leading the conversations in this group are retired Pacific Islands female clergy to share their journey from birth to blessing;
- Members from the Board of Ordained Ministry within the California-Pacific Conference will be invited to participate in this section and provide answers and help navigate the beginning process of candidacy and mentorship
    - The young people will receive important information on the 'next steps' to beginning the process of ordination in the United Methodist Church

[111] Matthew 28:19-20 (NRSV).

(Representatives from the Board of Ordained Ministry for the California-Pacific Conference will empower and engage in conversation and mock practice, the different stages of the process

- Serving on the Board of Ordained Ministry in Cal-Pac are several Pacific Islanders: three Tongan women (2-Elders; 1-Laity) and one Samoan man (Elder).
- Part of their presentation will include slides and presentation as provided on the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM):[112]

    1. Explore Your Call to Ministry
    2. Candidacy
    3. Candidacy Contact
    4. UMCARES Setup & FAQ
    5. Provisional Membership

- Another section of this group will hear from various Pacific Islanders who serve on the Conference level as staff and committee members, to learn how to engage as active participants in creating change, and not just bystanders of change
    - Pacific Islanders Commission (PIC) Co-Chairs
    - Pacific Islanders National Caucus of the United Methodist (PINCUM) Executive Director, President, and leadership team
    - Pacific Islanders elected as Delegates to the Western Jurisdiction and General Conference
        - significance of writing legislation to create change in the UMC doctrine
        - advocate for all Samoan-American women to earn a place in the *fale,* house (meaning a seat at the decision making table/gathering)

[112] GBHEM, "Clergy Leaders."

        - create and write curriculum for implement at the local church, district, conference
        - Create programs that will benefit children, women, and families in the neighborhood, and not just mono-culture; rather have a multi-cultural mindset and practice.
        - Learn to use the resources already available (United Methodist Women, United Methodist Men, Campus Ministry and Higher Education, Camping Ministries, Inter-Ethnic Caucuses like Black Methodist Church Renewal and MARCHA)
- Create community events to feature all of the women who've shared their faith journey and build a mentor/mentee relationship that will continue beyond the camp days and throughout the years.

What did I learn from this project?

Faatuatua, Faith—is the basis of this project. It is that which is needed in order for God to step in and provide wisdom, patience, courage, and kindness. It is all that is necessary to accomplish God's plans. *Faatuatua,* Faith—that which has carried me and so many of the young women here today; to learn that there is hope and that God who is all powerful, is also all loving and nurturing and compassionate and so much more! To view the interactions of the young women with the retired clergywoman is surreal. Why? Because who would have thought that all of these God-loving, faithful servants of Christ would brainstorm and devise plans to continue this work of sharing, empowering, and encouraging one another to say 'YES' to God!

Women realize that saying 'yes' is only the beginning. What lies ahead is a tumultuous path that not many can endure and still survive. The journey for women to serve God has been

impacted by the very body, the church, to which we love and serve. And still…as Christ endured the wilderness to be equipped to face his ultimate demise, our gift of salvation; then we as women have no excuse to not fulfill what God has already ordained. Awareness of the imperative for success should not make us ignore the coin's other face—the impact of failure on individual clergywomen's lives.[113]

What wasn't present that I can change?

Having a safe space for women to divulge, deflect, and decompress is important. It is also necessary. When women are given the opportunity to release things that are stagnant or hindering their growth, only then are we able to stand upright, with our shoulders back and our smiles on. It is when we are free to share and be vulnerable that God and others—mentors, friends, pastors, sisters in Christ—are able to walk alongside one another to continue the journey.

Duplicate? Reaffirming that the road is not easy or diluted. There are still many people in the world and within churches who do not believe that women should be preachers. Local congregations have the means, opportunity and sadly sometimes the motive, to destroy their pastor's mental, spiritual and emotional health.[114]

Reassess? Finding balance between *aiga,* family; *atunu'u,* community; *lotu/Ekalesia,* the church is essential to one's health and wellness. When the woman's mind, body, soul, and spirit are aligned and healthy—then the congregation that she serves will also benefit from that spiritual

[113] Blue, "Should Theological Education be Different for Clergywomen?" 67.
[114] Blue, "Should Theological Education be Different for Clergywomen?" 67.

health. Miriam Therese Winter et. al, complied comments from hundreds of women about their extreme discomfort in churches; some had left, but others remained, even while seeking spiritual nourishment elsewhere.[115]

What can I re-design so that it can be implemented for the next group/generation?!

This project was based on the age groups of the Pacific Islanders Youth & Young Adult Camp. However, as I shared in my personal journey, having a spouse (husband in my case) that is beyond supportive, empowering, and willing to not only play the role of 'housewife' but truly care and protect and provide for our family while I completed my studies and lived into my call as a clergywoman—is a God-given blessing. Therefore, another addition to the groups for future use is understanding and celebrating Single-ness; and for married folks and those who are in a relationship, celebrating Marriage and celebrating Partnerships.

What can this project do to help strengthen the ministries for women?

Ellen Blue explains it best when describing her metaphor for ministry as 'midwifing'. She writes, "We midwife the birth of souls, and the primary soul birth each of us has to attend to is our own."[116] Women are already powerful beings. They have endured the test of times and I believe that this project continues to showcase the strength of women especially in ministry and those discerning their call to ministry. To be able to recognize that strength, her power, her magnificence, her beauty and courage—that is the beginning of her ministry journey.

[115] Blue, "Should Theological Education be Different for Clergywomen?" 68.
[116] Blue, "Should Theological Education be Different for Clergywomen?" 68.

CONCLUSION

This project began as a quest to provide space, time, support, and encouragement to women, both young and seasoned, experienced and not, to all Samoan women—to have a platform to share, know and learn that they are not alone in their journey in ministry. This project evolved into something bigger than I could ever have imagined, and although a small part of it was implemented and accessed through the Pacific Islanders Youth & Young Adult Camp; this is only the beginning of a journey that began long before I was ever born or thought of. It stems even further to the creation of those mighty women, those warriors who were born long ago, and who never had a voice or the opportunity to not only sit in the *fale,* home, but *faifeau,* lead God's people at church, home, and in the community.

The project was a mere stepping stone towards a greater desire to equip, encourage, and empower women of all ages, color, ethnic backgrounds to not only pray and listen for their call. Most importantly, this project provides the necessary steps to begin to answer their call to ministry—whatever way that my look like, and to (i) discern their call, affirm their identities, and live out their faith in their cultural contexts. As the young women did through the breakout sessions at camp and in their interaction with the speakers, together with the experience of being surrounded by beautiful Pacific Islander women that are the 'firsts' of their kind in ministry; what a blessing it is to complete this project.

In reviewing the criteria and purpose of this project, I am elated to know that from the group of young women who participated in this project, three of them answered their call and began seminary; nearly 8 are serving in a position at the local church level; and majority continue to stay active in their local church and communities. Throughout the Pacific Islanders Youth & Young Adult Camp, I was able to (ii) create a space for dialogue, change, and inclusion

of women to be embraced by a culture that is rooted in the love of God and love for people. The Pacific Islanders Youth & Young Adult Camp was themed, "Rooted in God, Culture and Family." It was a most natural fit as the campers continued to share with me throughout their expressions of the project; recommendations on how to include different things, and how to contextualize it for the new and younger generations. I am so grateful for that and indebted to all of the young women and leaders who took time out of their busy lives to be a part of this project.

The Pacific Islanders Youth & Young Adult Camp also helped to (iii) provide a safe space for young people (youth and young adults) to seek and explore their vocational aspirations with church and community leaders. Having structural freedom to run this project and interject moments of clarification and participation allowed for a smooth and spirit-filled process. Thanks be to God for all who were able to make it for the duration of the camp; while others came and left as needed.

Lastly, (iv) the challenge for the next generations of Samoans, Tongans, Fijians and Pacific Islanders in their call to ministry while living authentically in a bi-cultural society was made. Through the building up of a network where young women and those currently serving in ministry, together with the retirees—we believe this is a first of its kind, especially since we have never had this type of resource before. I echo the sentiments of author, Mine Sunia Pase:

> We know that the power of God arises when we are in relation to God in spirit and in truth, as in the earliest church, where a small group of believers turned the world upside down with the good news of the Resurrection . . . Seen in the light, the plight of Samoan women no longer has a bleak outlook. Much hard work and prayer has gone into the struggle to lift up our women, and many have passed on without seeing it come into fruition. But dawn is breaking on the horizon for Samoan women, both in cultural circles and in the Christian arena. The aroma of women's ordination fills the air, and gives glory to God.[117]

I am eternally grateful for the opportunity to create a space for young women who have no voice.

[117] Pase, *Gospel and Culture*, 77.

Through this project, I have gained profound appreciation for my Samoan heritage and culture; understanding the complexities of role, status, and tradition. However, I am hopeful because my trust is in the Lord, and because I serve a living and loving God "who by the power at work within me [us] is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all I [we] can ask or imagine.[118] As a Samoan clergywoman, tasked to care and lead God's people in a local church as well as in a conference position for young people, I am in awe of God's grace and everlasting mercies upon my life. And it is only now, as this project is completed, that I realize . . . it is only the beginning!

This project has fueled within me the desire to never stop sharing, seeking, and knocking on the doors of justice for those young women who never knew women could be campus ministers on college campuses; or chaplains in hospitals or homes for the elderly. By God's grace, sharing and resourcing information that can change and impact one life at a time, that is my *misiona,* mission. Christ came, sat, ate, and shared with his people contextually—eating what they ate, drinking what they drank, and living as people did—wherever they were. Our Christian calling means giving expression to our new life in Christ in our cultural context.[119]

The process and countless hours of reading, researching, interviewing, and listening to the voices of those who paved the way long ago; whose writings and experiences; denials and struggles to lead where they were called; for those who planted the seed of hope within us and prepared the *laufala,* pandanus leaves, to *lalaga,* weave, and connect our *lau* to create a larger *'ie tonga,* finemat to *fola,* lay on the ground—so more women are able to *tala aao mai ma talanoa,* enter into a sacred space to share their stories and continue to empower others to do the same.

[118] Ephesians 3:20 (NRSV).
[119] Pase, *Gospel and Culture*, 78.

Esther 4:14 is a powerful reminder, “For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews form another quarter, but you and your father’s family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.”[120] I am a child of God. I am loved and I purposed for God’s glory and service. Like many clergywomen, Bishop Leontine Kelly faced opposition from some male clergy, regardless of their race, because they had difficulty accepting women in the pulpit—and Bishop Leontine Kelly was not deterred, and she would often refer to 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and proudly challenge audiences by saying, “I know what Paul said, but Paul didn’t call me—God did![121] May it be so, Lord! Your will be done.

[120] Esther 4:14 (NRSV).
[121] Current, *Breaking Barriers,* 103.

APPENDIX

SURVEY/QUESTIONNAIRE

1) *The Process – to beginning one's call to ministry*
    a. Have you ever felt a "nudging" to serve in ministry?
    b. If so, what did you believe you were called to? Explain.
    c. What is your ethnicity?
    d. Is your pastor aware of the "call" you have upon your life? Why or why not?
    e. Is there anything holding you back from beginning your first day of seminary or licensed local pastor?
2) *Knowledge of the United Methodist Church*
    a. Do you know if you want to do 1) pulpit ministry; 2) campus ministry; 3) missionary work or 4) remain where you are?
    b. What is the Name of the legislative body of The United Methodist Church that is the only body that speaks officially for the church? And how often do them meet?
    c. What conference do you belong to?
    d. What leadership role(s) do you serve in your local church?
    e. How long have you served in that capacity?
3) *Education and knowledge of Resources Available to Women*
    a. What is the name of the 800,000 member strong organization within the UMC targeted specifically for women?
    b. Does your local church have a unit for women? If so, list the names of the officers: _____

c. This organization is geared towards Youth and Young Adults in the UMC. Do you know who the main contact person is? How about the website or Name of the group? _____

4) Local church

a. Name of your Pastor (s): _____

b. What is the population of your local church membership?

c. Does your church participate in government programs to help the helpless?

d. What kinds of activities do you have for weekly fellowship at your site?

5) District and Conference Happenings

a. Do you know who your District Superintendent is?

b. What is the Name of the Bishop in your conference?

c. Name 3 other churches you have worked with in the past, present, or future; and in or around your area?

What is your greatest fear about starting your journey? Be honest with yourself. This is for your benefit and towards healing for your soul.

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